Hobby Girl

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Hobby Girl

by ForASecondThereWedWon

Summary

After Cassie gives her a rude awakening about her life choices, Samira throws herself into trying new hobbies in search of personal fulfillment. She doesn't expect catching feelings for Jack Abbott to be one of her extracurriculars. Is she doing this right?

Or; five times Samira found something to do with her free time, and one time she stuck with it.

Beads

It starts the day daylight savings time ends. Of course, Samira doesn't realize it's starting, and she doesn't realize daylight savings time ended that morning at 2am. She misses a lot because she thinks she's very late for work.

In reality, she's twenty minutes early.

Samira believes she's late so thoroughly, with such focus, that she misses other opportunities to tell the time. Because she knows the stops by heart and never usually looks up at the display, she doesn't glance at the digital sign on the bus she takes in, tapping her foot anxiously on the tacky floor. She doesn't ask any of the staff on her way into the hospital, not wanting to disturb their work when she can't even make it to her own shift on time. She doesn't check the clock on the wall, since she's here now, and just needs to get her shit stowed and her head together as fast as possible.

When Jack Abbott leans casually against the locker next to hers as she's yanking at her water bottle, caught in her backpack strap, she's instinctively annoyed by how relaxed he seems, even in her peripheral.

"I'm in the staff lot, second level," he whispers urgently, making her jump. "If we leave now, we can be on the highway in twelve minutes. We take the seventy-nine to the ninety, then cross the border into Canada."

The moment he leaned in to speak, Samira looked over, but she's full-on staring at him now, her hands motionless on the bottle, trying to sift any kind of sense from what he just said. He looks serious.

"*What*?"

"Somebody's after you, right? Who is it? Disgruntled patient? The cops? Boy, Samira, I had a feeling you'd be trouble…" Abbott pats her arm. "Explain in the car."

Samira's expression must be telegraphing pure bewilderment because he cracks a smile and takes pity on her.

"What's the rush?" he asks, a question that's also an answer for the hasty plan he just offered her. His posture's relaxed again and she

wishes she knew how to do that.

She goes back to fighting her bottle out of her bag as she explains, "I'm forty minutes late."

Abbott frowns and lifts his wrist to consult his watch.

"You're twenty minutes early," he counters.

Samira stops. Blinks.

"But it's twenty to eight."

"It's twenty to *seven*." When she practically glares at him in confusion, Abbott tacks on, "Clocks went back this morning."

Suddenly the lights are too bright in here, the responsibilities too great. She is too much of an idiot to practice medicine; she can't even tell time. It's an oversimplification, but right now, there's some perverse satisfaction in berating herself.

"*Fuuuuck*," she groans.

Abbott laughs and offers a commiserative "Yeah."

Samira winces.

"Sorry."

"For swearing? Shit, I'll try to forgive you, but you might have to give me some time."

She sighs.

"You alright?" he checks.

He's not leaning in anymore, but his voice is still tactfully soft. His eyes are sharp though, assessing her on their own before she can offer any input. Abbott and Samira are colleagues, they're friendly, but this is the first time she's felt he's trying to administer care to her. She can't exactly put her finger on what makes this different from his quick check-ins during the flurry of a procedure, but there's a feeling. A feeling she apparently has a few minutes to analyze in her currently-rebooting brain, since she's not late for work after all.

"Yeah, I'm just…"

She stops herself because she doesn't want to bore him by going on. But then she looks at him, and he doesn't look bored, or too busy to stand and talk for a minute. Though she prefers the day shift, her experience working nights has taught her the peaks and troughs of patient arrivals; things taper off after bars close, then pick up again during morning rush hour. The hour between 6 and 7 is part of the upswing, but not yet hectic. If Abbott's lingering here, it's because he has time to. He's a very responsible doctor. And he wouldn't, like, just hang out over here with her if he had something better to do.

"I guess I forgot about daylight savings and didn't change the time on my clock last night. Analogue," she explains.

"Retro," Abbott comments dryly. "You know your phone transitions automatically, right? Coulda set an alarm on there."

"Well, normally I do," Samira assures him, turning away from her locker and gesturing for emphasis. "*Normally* my phone doesn't die in the middle of the night."

"Forgot to charge it?"

"It's not that. It's—" She hesitates, but Abbott looks interested. Still. Samira sighs and gives in. "I fell asleep watching a video. It must've drained the battery."

Abbott gets a look on his face like he's trying *not* to have a look on his face, which makes Samira realize he just wondered whether she fell asleep watching porn. Oh god.

"It's something Dr. McKay said," she stumbles out.

"What'd Cassie say?"

Told me I don't have a life. But that's too embarrassing to admit, so Samira euphemizes the sentiment into something that hopefully shows her in a less pathetic light.

"That I should cultivate my hobbies," Samira lands on.

"And the hobby of choice is… spending more time on your phone?" Abbott ventures. He offers an ironic smile that happens to coincide with Samira going slightly weak in the knees. She blames the morning's panic.

She rolls her eyes at his teasing.

“No. I’m trying beading. Making stuff with beads?”

“Beading?” Abbott shifts like he should probably move on soon, but he doesn’t go just yet. “What made you pick that?”

“Well…” Samira thinks about it. “The beads are small, so it promotes fine motor skills—good for surgery. Plus, it’s pretty methodical. You know, just feeding beads onto a line. So, I thought it’d be a good stress-relief exercise. In theory.”

“In theory?”

“Once you get good at it. Which I’m not,” she clarifies with a self-deprecating smile.

“Hence the video.”

Samira nods.

“But it’s just beads on a line,” Abbott repeats. “How bad could—”

Before he can finish, she tips her backpack forward in her locker and wrenches the zipper wide. He cranes his neck to look inside.

“Oh. Yikes.”

The bottom of her bag is strewn with tiny blue and purple beads, looking like the gravel at the bottom of a pet store fish tank. Some of the beads catch the light and shimmer up at her, as though winking mockingly at this lame misfortune.

“Yeah,” Samira agrees. “It *was* for my keychain, but I was in a hurry this morning”—Abbott is nodding—“and I guess I was a little rough locking the door of my apartment. The thing basically fell apart in my hand and all I could do was dump a fistful of beads into my backpack and keep moving. I don’t think I did the knots right.”

He smiles like he’s probably trying not to laugh at her. She doesn’t think she’d mind if he did laugh, knows it wouldn’t be cruel. She sighs loudly and her shoulders slump as she exorcises the morning’s misadventures. She realizes how much better she feels now, how the minor disaster living at the bottom of her bag is kind of funny.

“How’s it been here?” she asks as she zips her bag shut again and pushes it into the locker.

“Oh, cakewalk compared to your day, Dr. Mohan.”

He looks weirdly proud when she gets her water bottle free, which should make her feel even more pathetic, but instead is sort of nice. She digs her phone out too, planning to charge it at the nurses' station.

"I've got a couple things to finish up before I head out," he says, "so I should get back to it. Unless you need…"

Abbott's hands snap up to mime driving, fingers locked as he jerks an imaginary wheel, forearm muscles tense and flexing as he pretends to shift. Does he drive stick? Not important.

Samira lets out a short laugh.

"That getaway plan was incredibly well-conceived," she notes, sounding genuinely impressed—which she is.

Abbott shrugs off her compliment and starts walking backwards away from her, hands closed around the ends of the stethoscope that hang either side of his neck. She sees his slight smile. Pleased. Her stupid heartrate kinda likes that look on his face.

She's looking forward again, ensuring her belongings are tucked within the confines of her locker so she can shut the door, when Abbott calls out, "Hey!"

Samira turns her head.

"When you figure out that keychain thing, make me one!"

She snorts and shakes her head at the silly request, and Abbott twists away to walk forward. She watches him until he leaves the hallway, out of her sightline.

And that's how it starts.

text message exchange between Samira Mohan & Trinity Santos

SM

Hey, why would somebody think I'd be trouble in the ER?

TS

the fuck

who said that to you

by which i mean, who am i accidentally
hitting with my car

SM

No one!!!

I don't think it was exactly a criticism. He
was kind of joking?

TS

fine

i'm reserving judgment on the vehicular
manslaughter until you tell me the
exact words

SM

"I knew you'd be trouble."

Something like that.

TS

samira.

smh

SM

What???

TS

pull your hetero head out of your ass

respectfully

SM

[Samira is typing]

TS

ok no you're actually so pathetic i'm going to translate

that man is flirting with you

you were flirted with

SM

[Samira is typing]

TS

now tell me who said that and when exactly you plan to bang dr. abbott

SM

Trinity!!!

TS

all that typing and that's all you got?

and pls. with the scandalized triple punctuation

SM

There's no connection between Jack and I.

TS

but there could be

a very literal physical connection

junk to junk

SM

Romantic.

TS

you know me

hey, you like magic?

SM

I'm afraid to answer that.

Ok, sure. Why?

TS

i pulled a quarter out of a dude's ear
today

SM

That's disgusting.

Did you get a picture?

Samira has her TV volume on low, humming as she sinks back into her couch, blithely feeding one bead after another onto the length of line she cut for her project. She's telling herself she can do this, that right now her life is being a doctor and *this*, with this being the obviously easier thing to do. So.

She feels like she set herself up for failure last time by spreading the supplies out on her kitchen table. Too formal. The new tactic is to sneak up on competency by making the whole atmosphere casual: comfy posture, low-stress show on in the background, let her hands work without her mind getting in the way. Lots of people knit while they watch TV. Just clackin' away, no sweat. Samira's like those people. If she knew how to knit.

The show goes to commercial, so she hums louder to cover the ads. *Hey*, she thinks, *I'm getting good at this*. She smiles at the little shape she's making, and it doesn't *exactly* look the way she planned, but that's alright. She's a beginner. The thing is to keep moving, don't let her brain catch up with her hands.

Samira hits the chorus and switches from absentminded humming to words, belting the lyrics to "Life is a Highway" into her apartment.

Don't let her brain…

Highway. Getaway car. Abbott. *I had a feeling you'd be trouble*.

…catch up with her hands.

Samira fumbles her grip, overcorrects with a jolt, and sends little blue beads pouring across her lap, trickling down over her feet. It's fine, it's honestly fine, it's just the sudden flare of heat up the back of her neck that keeps her flustered as she clamps her hand tight around the fragment she didn't manage to scatter, then rises gingerly to her feet to keep the wreckage as contained as possible.

She'll start again, just—

No fancy shapes.

And better knots.

Poses

Chapter Notes

> Thank you all so much for the warm reception of chapter 1! Your kind comments and kudos (and over 60 subscriptions!) helped me fly through the second chapter :) Hope you enjoy the new installment!
>
> If you'd like to share any *Hobby Girl*-specific or general *Pitt* thoughts or prompts, I'm on Tumblr!

Mel's already beaming when she comes around the corner where she asked Samira to meet her, mittens grasping the straps of the two yoga mats rolling against the back of her winter coat like a catamaran bobbing on the waves. God, Samira misses summer.

"This's gonna be so fun!" is Mel's greeting.

"Yeah!" Samira smiles back as they fall in step. "Thanks for asking me!"

Because despite the bitterly cold air and the waking up early on her day off, Samira has a feeling it really will be fun.

It's late December in Pittsburgh, when the cheerful first flakes that make people feel like children again are ancient history and reality looks like gutters drab with the brown grit that's left over when that innocent early snow melts and mixes with road sand. It's also the stretch of the year between the holidays with the greatest gravitational pull and New Year's Eve, which, according to Mel, is the perfect time for her to bring Samira to her gym as a guest; most of the regulars have slacked off to indulge in parties and large, lethargy-inducing meals, and the new members who join because of fitness resolutions won't get here until next week.

"No problem," Mel says. "It's the first time I've gotten to ask for a guest pass. Isn't that cool?"

"I guess so," Samira allows, then thinks about it. How nice it was of Mel to offer this as a suggestion when she found out about Samira's Adventures in Hobbying. How special it is that Mel wants to include her at a place where she feels happy and calm—in some ways the opposite of the place they usually spend time together. She grins.

“Yeah, that is cool.”

Mel just smiles back, then says, “Oh! It’s right up here.”

Samira looks where she points, just a couple of storefronts down, and gets a quick chance to study the outside of Mel’s gym. Not a huge footprint on the ground, but it goes up three floors, merging neatly with the other buildings on this block. Looks like residential apartments over the eyewear shop next door, and there’s a cute-looking café across the street. Samira doesn’t live that far—she only took one bus to get here, and it didn’t take long—but she’s never walked around this area before. It’s nice, she thinks. This whole thing is nice. Her spirits lift as she jogs a couple steps ahead of Mel to grab the door. Mel mutters a sheepish thank you as she knocks her way in, yoga mats smacking the door frame.

Inside, Samira takes one of the mats so Mel can get her membership card out, plus the guest pass for Samira.

“The instructor’s name is Tonya, and all the rooms for the fitness classes are up on the second floor,” Mel’s explaining while Samira glances around as they pass through the entryway. It looks like the first floor is dedicated to weights and machines. “Lockers are in the basement, so we can just—”

Samira tears her eyes away from a woman running like an absolute *gazelle* on a treadmill (she’s hoping everyone at this gym isn’t so effortlessly coordinated), glancing at Mel when her speech trails off. Mel has her phone in her hand and she’s frowning down at it. She’s getting a call.

“Sorry, I—”

“Take it,” Samira urges.

Mel flashes her a quick, closed-lipped smile, and picks up. “Hello? Yeah. Uh huh. Nope, nobody mentioned anything when I brought Becca in this morning. Ok, well that’s good. Maybe we should— Ok, yes, I can come in, if that’s easiest? No, no problem. Alright. Thank you for your call.”

She hangs up, and Samira scans her face. Mel doesn’t look worried, but definitely disappointed.

“Is everything ok?” Samira checks.

“Yeah, it’s just…” Mel closes her eyes and shakes her head, like she’s shaking off whatever the problem is. She opens her eyes again and explains. “I guess there’s been a staffing change at Becca’s centre and her schedule might have to get adjusted. I’m sure it’ll be fine, I just think I… I should probably go sit down with someone in person. Just to make sure everybody’s on the same page.”

“And they want you to come in now,” Samira interprets.

“Yeah.” Mel winces apologetically. “I really don’t want to bail on you, I just—”

“It’s fine,” Samira promises, nodding for emphasis. “If it were me, I’d want to go in person too. It’s for your sister. Go get things sorted out.”

Mel smiles gratefully.

“Will you be ok taking the class alone? I promise Tonya’s really nice, but if you don’t feel comfortable, we can totally do this another day.”

“No, I’m gonna stick it out,” Samira decides. She’s here. She has a pass. She takes a sideways glance at the gym’s large front windows. She can escape the cold for a while. “Do you want to take your yoga mat, or…?”

Samira starts to sling it off her shoulder, but Mel shakes her head.

“I can get it back another time. We’ll hang out?”

“Definitely,” Samira says firmly. They haven’t done a ton of that—hanging out—but it’s something Samira’s trying to get better at: relationships. Specifically, friendships. The people part of her job has been mostly about her patients, but she’s been working on making it about her colleagues too, getting to know more about them than how quickly they type up their reports and what size gloves they snap on when they walk into a treatment room.

Mel departs with her trademark swift walk and Samira turns to find the stairs to the second floor.

Without Mel, she doesn’t bother detouring to the locker room; she unzips her coat on the way up, figuring there’ll be a place to dump it in the studio. Her keys, phone, and wallet are all inside, burrowed like rabbits within the pockets that plunge between layers of down. It’s so warm in here—comfortably, but it’s such a change from the outdoors—that Samira’s almost sweating when she finds the right room.

There are a few other people hanging around the closed door, and Samira realizes they must be waiting for another fitness class to let out. She and Mel were a little early, counting on a pit stop at the lockers before their class started.

She leans against the wall opposite the door and pulls her phone out of a pocket. *Nice to see you anyway!* she texts Mel. *I hope everything works out with the schedule.*

Thanks! shoots right back to her. *Enjoy the class! Talk later!*

Samira's smiling at her screen when the door opens and people start to trickle out. She doesn't look up right away. Not until—

"Samira?"

Her head jerks up because she knows that voice, even when she isn't paying attention, even when she's only ever heard it in the Pitt.

"Dr. Abbott!"

She blinks at him. At him in his workout shorts and his muscle T that makes Samira understand why it's called that. At him as he comes to stand close to her to keep out of the way of the other people leaving the room. Her accelerating heartrate prompts her to breathe deeply through her nose, and she can smell his sweat. She's smelled his sweat before, of course, just like he's smelled hers. But there's a difference between sweat blended with blood and viscera and mop water and a hundred other ER smells, and sweat that just curls around the edges of a woodsy deodorant scent. This isn't the smell of Jack Abbott plus bodies, just Jack Abbott's *body*. Warm and tall and with the limbs exposed. Samira swallows, which is bad because now she can kinda taste him too.

"So formal, Dr. Mohan?" he teases.

"Uh, sorry, I…"

But she can't explain why running into him outside of work feels like seeing one of her elementary school teachers at a grocery store. And he is her teacher, in a way. He's her teacher in a way where she respects and admires his vast medical knowledge while also having a raging mental hard-on for how his fingers look poised around a scalpel. *Yeah, don't say that, Samira*, she coaches herself.

"Sorry, I didn't expect to see you here," she says, figuring if she just

goes for honesty, there's less chance he'll notice how hard she's fighting to keep her eyes on his face and off his shoulders.

"It should be me saying that," Dr. Abbott—*Jack*—argues. "I'm here all the time, and I've never seen you."

"Oh! Well, yeah, I don't have a membership. Mel does. I came with her."

Jack nods, like he's seen Mel around the gym, but when he glances down the hall, Samira knows he won't see her here now.

"…But she had to go," Samira adds, not saying any more. She's still relatively new to this whole seeing-colleagues-outside-of-work thing, and she doesn't know how much other people share with each other about their personal lives. It doesn't feel like her place to tell Jack details of Mel's life.

Jack doesn't press, because he's not like that, just nods again.

"What are you… here for?" she asks, phrasing failing her when Jack turns his head to watch the last people leave the room and her gaze gets caught on a muscle in his neck.

"Tai chi." He turns back to her and sees her expression. "You look surprised."

But you're all sweaty, Samira's thinking. *Does tai chi make people sweat?*

"A little," she admits, keeping the other thoughts locked inside.

"It's meditative," he explains.

"Isn't it kinda… slow?" She feels the irony in complaining about slowness when that used to be Robby's main complaint about how she works.

"I can go slow. Slow can feel good." And these would just be words, but for the way Jack's eyes settle on hers as he says them.

Even Samira hears how shakily she exhales, and Jack clears his throat.

"I do strength training first," he adds.

"Weights?"

"Yeah."

That explains the sweat.

“I usually do nothing,” Samira offers, with a smile at her own expense. “So, this is new for me.”

She doesn’t tell him about the good fitness intentions of her past, how she once convinced herself she could totally train for a marathon and then completely gave up. How she’s wearing those expensive running shoes now, but she normally uses them for going up and down in her apartment building, carrying her laundry to the machines in the basement. How the back of the shoes is all collapsed from always jamming her feet in instead of just untying the laces. No, telling of the marathon hopeful she once was is a brag that would only humble her.

“Yoga?” Jack checks unnecessarily, since Samira still has Mel’s mat resting along her back.

Samira’s nodding as a very in-command-looking woman in coordinated purple exercise gear comes striding down the hall with her own mat. She greets one of the people who’s been waiting with Samira, and Samira assumes this is the aforementioned Tonya.

They’re going in now, so Samira looks again to Jack, mouth open to say, *Well, see you later!* or *Take care!* or *Nice smelling you!*

But Jack says, “I think I’ll join.”

“You will?” she replies, startled.

But he is, he already *is*, walking into the studio right behind Samira and grabbing himself a mat from the neatly rolled stack just inside the door.

And this is fine, so Samira drops her mat on the floor where she intends to roll it out. While Jack’s spreading his own mat next to hers, she hurries to the back wall and slips out of her shoes and socks (after watching what other people do; except Jack, who she assumes is keeping his shoes on for grip, since the bottom of his prosthesis would be smooth), then folds her coat on top of them. There’s plenty of room; it’s only a few minutes until the class is scheduled to start, and there are just four other people in here besides Samira, Jack, and Tonya, up at the front. Finally, she pulls her sweatshirt over her head and drops that on the top of her neat pile of belongings. She pads back over to her mat, crouching to remove the strap and unfurl the length of the mat along the floor.

Jack has a water bottle that he sets next to his mat, and other than that, he's just standing there, looking as undaunted as Samira wishes she could feel when she tries new things.

Except, then he looks over at her, and he's no longer *just standing there*—he's checking her out. Normally, Samira would think he *might be* checking her out, but Trinity's gone to work on what she refers to as Samira's "flirtation density" lately, so with her perspective cued to be more aware of when someone's interested, Samira recognizes what's happening.

What's happening is she stripped off her functional layers, leaving a longline sports bra and yoga pants (typically reserved for sitting on the couch), a span of skin between where one ends and the other begins. Plus her chest, collarbones, shoulders—all these innocuous areas that, for Jack, live out of sight (and, presumably, out of mind) beneath Samira's scrub top at work.

Well, look at you! she could counter. *With your chiselled calves! Is it leg day, Jack? Are you taunting me with leg day?*

It gets worse when they begin. Samira thinks she's doing ok with everything, though she moves with less certainty than the class regulars, but then they slide into something called "warrior two." She glances around surreptitiously, making sure her arms look like everyone else's, and her gaze sticks to Jack like honey, also dragging viscously over him like honey; his raised arms leave the oversized armholes of his T-shirt open to her observation, and Samira nearly loses her footing over a peek of his taut lats.

"Breathe," says Tonya.

Good idea, Samira thinks, because she's been forgetting to.

Tonya's not only good at keeping Samira from passing out; she also offers adapted moves as she goes after noticing Jack's prosthesis and Samira's graceless wobbling on tree pose.

For several reasons, Samira feels more sure of herself when the class moves down to the floor. There's no chance of falling over now, and the stretches feel really good. It's a reminder of how much standing she does at work, and how much sitting at home, but when Samira shuts her eyes and sighs when she gets to extend her arms and let her head hang down, limp, she thinks Tonya could restore her battered body like an antique chair. She steals a look at Jack, and he must feel her eyes this time, because he looks back. They both laugh softly—

warm, relaxed, becoming one with the floor. Maybe that's not right, but it feels true to Samira.

Tonya leads the class through more floor poses, but when Tonya scans her eyes over her students, Samira knows the comment about making sure their hips are aligned with their leg as they sink into pigeon pose —*pigeon pose?*—is for her. She looks at the others, trying to figure out where she's going wrong, because she is sitting up too high. Is her front foot too close? Is her back leg at the wrong angle? It's hard to look back and check.

Tonya looks as if she's going to rise from her mat to come help, but, next to Samira, Jack politely waves the instructor off, coming out of the pose and shifting close to Samira himself.

"Here," he says quietly, wrapping one hand around the ankle of her forward leg to gently rotate her foot. When that's done, and while Samira's too busy remembering to breathe to do anything else, Jack's other hand lands on her lower back and guides it into a soft arch, saying, just as soft, "And here."

Samira nods, and Tonya holds them in that position long enough for Jack to get back to his own mat before they all fold forward over their knees, bringing their foreheads towards the floor. Samira's heart is hammering. She can't even tell whether she's touching her head to the mat. All she can feel is the memory of Jack's hand, spread over her back, a couple fingers on her bare skin.

"Exhale," says Tonya.

When it's over, Samira's thirstier than she thought she'd be. Her inexperience shows in the fact that she forgot her water bottle. Jack drinks from his own, then offers it to her, apparently without a second thought. Samira stares at it.

Without a word, he draws it back towards himself and raises the hem of his shirt to swipe along the lip of the bottle, where his mouth touched. Like that's the problem: Samira must be wary of germs. This is so much worse. It's *so* much worse. Samira accepts the bottle and manages to swallow water without choking. He smiles at her. She might die here. They can bury her under the stack of yoga mats.

"Are you gonna be…?" he asks vaguely as they leave the studio and head down to the first floor.

"Yeah," Samira answers immediately. "I'll be here."

She stands near the front desk, coat folded over her arm, and wonders if people are looking at her. Not like she needs to get a life—the way Cassie still sometimes looks at her at the end of a shift when Samira says she's just heading home, no plans—but like they're jealous. She has her proximity to Jack in mind, of course, but she slides the elastic from her hair and gives it a tousle with her hand, feeling pretty good about herself too.

Jack should be back in just a few minutes; he's collecting his stuff from the downstairs lockers. They didn't exactly make plans, but there's definitely a loose invitation in the air. Samira looks through the front windows at the café opposite. They could get coffee. They could be two colleagues, getting coffee. They could get coffee and sit in a booth and Samira could lean forward with her elbows on the table just to see if Jack would reach out to touch her lower back again. She could say, *Actually, I have coffee at my apartment*, and let her eyes say the rest.

God, it's like 9am.

To distract herself, Samira slips a hand into her coat pocket and retrieves her phone. It rings as she grabs it.

"Samira?" Mel asks prematurely. Mel has great hearing; she must have heard the call pick up before Samira had a chance to speak.

"Mel! Everything go ok?"

"Yeah," Mel says, "everything's good. I was just wondering, since I kinda flaked this morning, if you wanted to go for brunch?"

"You didn't *flake*," Samira assures her fondly.

"Well, I still feel bad about cancelling our plans when we were right in the middle of them."

Samira understands. Samira doesn't want Mel to feel bad. Samira can't see a way to tell Mel she was just planning out her possible coffee date with Dr. Abbott in her head without feeling like that would be ditching Mel, who would obviously urge Samira to go. But Mel and Samira had plans first.

"Don't," Samira says. "Now we have new plans. Where do you want to eat?"

They decide on a place close enough that Samira's going to walk, then

hang up.

Jack reappears as she's shrugging into her coat. There's a brightness to him that suggests he took the world's fastest shower down in the locker room. For his own sake? For hers? Did he also picture his hand on her back in the café and let himself get a little carried away?

Samira breaks the news about meeting up with Mel, trying to let him see that she's disappointed not to stay with him longer without looking so disappointed that he'll think she secretly hates Mel and is looking for a way out of her plans. It's basically a grimace, but softened.

"Hey, no sweat," Jack says easily, and Samira smiles because it feels like a joke after how they just spent their morning. "You need a ride to the place?"

"No, it's…" Samira points uselessly, trying to communicate that it isn't far.

"Alright."

But he does hold the door open for her while they walk out together. And, when he pulls out his car keys, telling her he's parked in the opposite direction from the way she has to go, she catches a flash of blue beads swinging from the chain.

text message exchange between Jack Abbott & Michael Robinavitch

JA

You got Mohan's cell?

MR

?

JA

Don't worry about it

Text it to me?

MR

✓

JA

Thanks, brother

Walkies

Chapter Notes

> I mentioned the number of subscriptions on this fic after the first chapter, and then many, many people said "hold my iced coffee" and almost doubled that number. So, hi, all of you!
>
> I'm also so touched by all of the enthusiastic comments. I've written for many different fandoms (just believe me; don't look at my fandoms list), and it is a special thing to participate in something we're all so excited to talk about.
>
> We're jumping over into Jack's POV for this chapter, but it's still very much Samira-focused (because Jack is very Samira-focused). Enjoy this one! I think it's pretty cute.

He doesn’t call her.

When Robby shoots him Samira’s number, Jack adds her to his contacts, furtively, covetously, feeling like this is where he steps out of bounds. After that, he never scrolls through his contact list at work, in case somebody sees her name and wonders—even though they work together, even though the number came from Robby. But Robby has everybody’s number; he’s the whole fuckin’ phone tree in any emergency. Jack’s not Robby. Not that he’s taciturn… No, it’s exactly like that. Unless he’s in the Pitt, Jack’s a man of few words, more of a listener than a talker, and his colleagues know that about him. Probably one of just a handful of things they know, since, well, *taciturn*.

Not with Samira, but being different with Samira is exactly the problem, is exactly the thing that stands out. Jack doesn’t call her because he’s too suspicious of any out-of-character behaviour in himself to make that move. He doesn’t call her precisely because of how much he wants to, trusting himself more when there’s no slack in the leash he keeps himself on. He’s on fire the way Springsteen is in the song.

The year turns, January stampeding December, and February elbowing January aside, and sometimes Jack has dreams that are just his hand on Samira’s ankle. Sometimes his fingers trace along the bone, then get a good grip and drag her towards him, and they fuck on the yoga studio floor. Sometimes there’s no sense in the dream but

touch, but he knows it's her. Lately, it's always her.

Even if Jack didn't realize how neurotic he's being—not contacting a woman who, by outward signs, seems like she wouldn't be averse— he has a therapist to remind him. Initially, he doesn't talk about Samira during sessions, but as startling and uncomfortable as it sometimes feels to have his expression or body language or mood interpreted without being aware that he's projecting anything, intuition is probably a good trait in a therapist. It looks a lot like how he looks when he's on edge, he's told. But happier. The word "yearning" is floated and met by Jack's dead stare (and then reflected on when he gets home because *fuck*).

So, he gets used to the dreams. He gets neighbourly with the conscious comprehension that he'd really like to get Samira off. He builds a tentative friendship with "yearning." But he still doesn't call.

He and his therapist unpack this. Unfortunately, it's in Jack's style of unpacking: remove only what you need and do it fast. If anything else has to come out in order to get to it, extract in an orderly fashion and pack it all back up the way you found it when you're done. His therapist has never called him difficult, but there's an *are you shitting me?* head tilt that Jack has learned to recognize. Two can play at that game.

They don't do simple diagnoses, his therapist and he, but they circle the question "Do you think you might be scared?" They do this different ways, like identifying the emotions Jack feels when he hovers his thumb over Samira's name in his phone, like voicing hypothetical outcomes (Samira picks up; Samira doesn't pick up; Jack communicates his interest via text instead, but accidentally sends it as a group text to everyone in Emerg), like his therapist glancing at the wedding band Jack sometimes wears.

"I want to," Jack insists at every turn, sometimes gripping the arms of the chair in frustration.

It'd be easier if they could just bump into one another again, like they did that day at the gym. They see each other at work, of course, and when Samira ended up on a week of night shifts mid-January, Jack had to wonder if it was by request. But they don't discuss much besides the cases they've been reading lately and the ones happening right in front of them. He's pretty sure Perlah and Princess are talking about them. He's become so fucking good at reading everyone but himself.

The facts of this case of theirs are that it's easy to talk to Samira, it's easy to joke with her, and it's really easy to count on her to do everything the job demands and more. It's easy to imagine stroking her glossy dark hair, and easy to remember the shape of her body in yoga clothes. It's even easy to flirt with her. Too easy—that's what gets him in trouble. Because if he'd just resisted *that*, if he just hadn't studied her to learn where her buttons are and just how hard to press, he could've gotten past this with her considering him distant but respectable. Taciturn.

He's fucked it by flirting. Because she knows. Because she's probably waiting on him. Because, if Samira thinks of him at all, it's likely to wonder, *What's taking so long?*

The snow on the sidewalk is downy and thin, reminding him of the boyish fuzz that grew along his jaw in high school, when he learned to shave. The light covering seems more for looks at this point, a last flash of winter's beauty before March arrives and makes a huge fucking mess with cold, thick rain.

Anyway, the dog seems into it. He's trotting along at Jack's side like the adult he's growing into, though with a full rear-end wiggle every time he wags his tail that proves he isn't done being a puppy. Jack shouldn't have this dog right now, but Robby worries, and then it's hard to say no…

That's how he ends up with a dog sleeping on a plush cushion next to his bed, dogsitting from yesterday evening until this afternoon, when Jack's been told to pass him off to a dogwalker.

"Think you'll like this dogwalker?" Jack demands of the dog as they wait to cross an intersection.

The dog looks up at him with curious eyes, then his tongue flops winningly out the side of his mouth.

"Of course," Jack answers for him. "You like everybody. Or else they wouldn't have stuck you with me for the night."

He reaches down and scratches the top of the dog's curly head.

The light changes, they cross the street, and Jack would swear he doesn't see her yet when he starts to wonder why he's taking the dog to the dogwalker instead of the dogwalker coming to him. Wouldn't that be usual? Isn't the whole reason to hire a dogwalker because they

come get your pet during the day, while you're at work? But then he comes back out of his thoughts to realize the person standing on the sidewalk up ahead isn't moving, and that, actually, he's seen that coat before. That stance. That dark curl of hair below the edge of a winter hat.

She sees him before he gets to her. When their eyes meet, he inhales, cold and sharp. Samira.

Jack tries to say hello without showing how elated he is, worrying the warmth that seems to spread outward from his chest when he's within ten feet of her will melt the snow in an obvious circle like a sunburst.

He's not (quite) so single-minded as to miss that there's more going on in Samira's head; she looks happy to see him, but puzzled, and she keeps glancing down at the dog.

"Sorry," he cuts in, thinking he'd better explain. "Just taking this guy to the dogwalker."

"Oh," she says. Then, "Yeah," she says. "No, yeah, that's me. I mean, not, like professionally, but I've been—"

"I'm bringing this dog to *you*?"

And then Samira looks straight at the dog and asks it, "Zachary?" which neither Jack nor the dog can refute. This is the dog's name. Zachary barks once, joyfully, growing impatient with the holdup as they stand still on the sidewalk.

"This *is* Langdon's dog," Samira checks, brow furrowed in a way that endears her to him more every time.

"It is," Jack assures her. He passes off the leash, and Samira loops the handle around her wrist, but stares at the dog like he's an alien.

"How do you have Langdon's dog?"

"He worked overtime last night. Collapse at a construction site—"

"I heard."

"I said I'd keep Zachary until, well…" Jack gestures towards Samira. *Until I handed him off to you—who I wasn't expecting to be* you.

"I'm missing something," Samira insists.

Zachary barks again and they start walking to appease the poor guy, even though Jack's supposed to be off the clock on dogsitting now. That's not all this is anymore.

"I guess I just didn't realize you and Langdon were that close," she tries again.

"Robby volunteered me."

"Ok…"

Classic Dr. Mohan, Jack thinks, glancing sideways at her. *Always wanting to piece things together. Always trying to understand.*

"He, uh…" Jack scratches nervously at the back of his head, though he's wearing a hat. "He tries to make sure I'm not alone too much."

Now she looks like she's going to ask him either if *he* thinks he's alone too much, or why that would be Robby's concern. Like Zachary, Jack is made uncomfortable by anticipation. As much as he likes Samira, he's not about to explain this to her on the sidewalk in the middle of the afternoon. About the roof, and Robby knowing, and the mundane routine of it all.

Samira just watches him for a minute and says, "That's either a really nice thing for Robby to do or super fucking interfering."

Jack laughs out loud.

"It's actually both," he tells her.

"That sounds about right," she reasons, then gives him an anxious look and pleads, "Don't tell Robby."

Jack promises, not just because he likes the idea of a secret between them.

They cross to a park, and while Zachary's roaming more freely at the end of his leash, Samira turns to Jack.

"Am I keeping you?"

I wish, he thinks. But, of course, that isn't what she means.

"No. Did you want me to…?" He gestures back the way they came, meaning clear off.

Samira says, “No. Stay,” and bites her lips together like she’s either cold or fighting a smile. Jack doesn’t hide his. Maybe he should, but right now, the self-preservation instincts just aren’t kicking in. All he can think about is how he’s wanted to talk to her—though now he couldn’t say what the hell he wanted to talk about.

“I don’t normally do this,” Samira starts, making Jack look at her in interest. But she clarifies, “Dogwalking. Like, Langdon’s not paying me to walk Zachary.”

“Cheapskate.”

Samira laughs.

“No, I’ve just been trying a lot of new things lately, and I like animals. I don’t own one, and I don’t know if I could right now, you know, living alone…” She trails off, then clears her throat, not looking at him. “I’m sort of living vicariously through the pet owners in my life.”

“So, Zachary isn’t your first ward?” Jack asks.

Samira glances at him as she earnestly confesses, “I fed Mel’s rabbit last week.”

“And what was that like?”

“Big. Twitchy. It sat on my lap and nibbled a lettuce leaf. I kinda think I’m in love.”

They wind through and around the park, letting Zachary lead in a way that’s probably not great for his training, but that leaves Jack and Samira free to talk while the dog tends his own happiness. Though they talk about work, they also talk about Samira; she fills in the gaps between the parts of her hobby quest he’s witnessed. As she speaks, he takes his keychain from his pocket, pulls off a glove, and spins the ring around his finger, making Samira look both delighted and embarrassed as she spies her own handiwork decorating it.

Falteringly, he asks how she felt about yoga. Samira doesn’t meet his eye as she admits she hasn’t been back to the gym (he’s noticed), but that she and Mel have done it on their own in Mel’s apartment. Jack almost offers his living room because there’s space, the rug uncluttered by furniture so it’s easy to get around when he isn’t using his prosthesis, sometimes hopping, sometimes propped on a crutch if he’s tired after a gruelling shift. Because he’s abundantly aware that the offer would necessarily be flirting, he doesn’t make it. Come over

and lie down on my floor? Make my space your space, and stretch your body to fill it? Come over and do the thing that we discovered together makes it impossible for me to not touch you?

Eventually, they leave the park and head towards Langdon's. Jack can only go part of the way with Samira; he has to work tonight, and he didn't plan to spend so much of his afternoon with the dog—though Zachary is a world-class facilitator of time with Samira. Jack's pretty sure the dog just wingman-ed him. As the three of them approach the corner where their paths will diverge, Jack starts to wonder if this was a date. Not an intentional one, but a date in hindsight, a date when it's already fading from view. He has this weird urge to take Samira in his arms when they stop and linger on the sidewalk, except the fantasy's not weird at all, and actually incredibly persuasive and lucid. But Jack doesn't want to take a big step forward with her only to stumble after, trying to maintain the pace.

Samira's turning away when she stops and frowns thoughtfully.

"By the way," she says, "who names a dog 'Zachary'?"

"He let his kids name it. He said they named the dog after one of their friends," Jack recalls.

"That's actually cute."

"Unfortunately," he teases, drawing attention to the reluctance of her admission.

"*No*," Samira protests. "I just mean—"

"Take it easy, Dr. Mohan, I won't tell Langdon you wanted to hate his dog's name. Or his children's taste. I wonder which would hurt his feelings more."

"Stop it," she says, grinning, and this isn't an invitation to let him fuck her downward doggy style over the back of his couch, but it is flirting.

"You working tomorrow?" he asks her.

"Yeah."

"Ok," he says. "I'll wait up." He winks because it's a joke, because he's on the night shift, because staying awake waiting for her to arrive is basically built into that.

And he winks because he likes what it does to her.

He likes what it does to *him*.

text message exchange between Jack Abbott & Samira Mohan

JA

When I said
[message deleted]

Hey, Samira, I
[message deleted]

Remember when I handed off that gnarly infected pin protrusion to you? It was approximately thirteen minutes ago and
[message deleted]

When we were doing patient exchange this morning and I told that patient I would be only too lucky to be in your hands, what I meant
[message deleted]

Do you think the nurses overheard the conversation we just had? NOT that there's anything to
[message deleted]

Shit. It's Jack Abbott

SM

Hell of an introduction.

Is that what your enemies say when they see you approaching down a dark alley?

JA

I didn't mean to send that

But yeah

Striking fear into the hearts of lesser men is what I do on my nights off

SM

That and dogsit.

JA

Don’t tell my secrets

SM

I would never.

text message exchange between Princess Dela Cruz & Perlah Alawi

PD

👀

PA

👀

Pages

Chapter Notes

> Little bit longer between chapters this time around because it was a particularly busy week for me (and because this is the longest chapter yet!). You're all marvelous, as always, for keeping me motivated with your wonderful comments!!
>
> This chapter contains some discussion of Jack's canon suicidal ideation. This happens in the fourth section (pay attention to dividing lines), if you'd like to pass over!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Remember,” Trinity counsels, transferring a trio of paperbacks from her intense grasp to Samira’s upraised palms one by one. “Funny and cute. Predictable yet satisfying. And this one…” She smirks wickedly, crossing her arms after handing off the final book. “You’re just gonna have to find out for yourself.”

“I’ll *try*,” is the most Samira’s willing to promise. She slips the books into her backpack, then zips it shut.

“Trust me,” Trinity says, looking smugger than ever. “You’ll be totally hooked. You’ll be wondering what you ever wasted your time on before realizing romance novels existed.”

Samira has to roll her eyes at that.

“I definitely knew they *existed*.”

“Which counts for nothing. Now you’re really gonna know—in, like, a biblical sense.”

Samira makes a face.

Trinity doubles down, giving Samira’s arm a light smack.

“*Seriously*! This is gonna change your boring little life. Said with love.” Trinity sticks out her bottom lip as though already pleading forgiveness for this backhanded compliment—maybe front-handed insult?

“Reading case studies before bed isn’t boring,” Samira argues, but she

argues it under her breath, knowing how it would play into Trinity's hands, provoking her pity. Even her ER friends find Samira's thirst for medical texts a little bit lame.

She slings her backpack on over her raincoat. It's almost April, and it looked dark out beyond the doors of the ambulance bay when she checked a few minutes ago.

Trinity throws a companionable arm across her shoulders. Samira gives her a look that's weary but fond, and Trinity tilts her head to bonk it lightly against Samira's.

"You should know what you want," Trinity says in a tone that's quiet but kind—something it's taken many months and nonworkplace hangouts for Samira to hear from her.

"I know what I want."

Trinity's gaze turns playfully scornful.

"Can you stop thinking about your career for five seconds? You know what I mean."

Yes, Samira knows what she means. She knows that sharing some of her favourite romance novels is how Trinity proposes to nudge Samira into some kind of sexual confidence Trinity thinks Samira currently lacks. Which she totally doesn't; there's a difference between a lack of sexual confidence and just… not rushing into things. Samira has always felt that there's a lot to be said for taking your time, proceeding with caution. Especially when the context involves an attending physician. Especially when it's become normal for her to wake up to texts on her phone, sent by Jack on his night shift, knowing she won't see them until morning. It feels like something people in a relationship would do, but Samira hasn't been in one of those in a while. And a serious one? Maybe never. But they text, sometimes flirtatiously, and whenever their work schedules align or overlap, she's sure there's something there. She gets this phantom heat in her lower back whenever their eyes lock.

Trinity slides her arm from Samira to grab her by both shoulders, raincoat rustling, holding her at arm's length in front of her.

"Eventually," she says solemnly, "one of you repressed freaks is going to make a move. I want you to get whatever you're hoping for out of it."

“And because you don’t trust me to know what to hope for on my own, you’re giving me these,” Samira replies ruefully, reaching back to pat the bottom of her backpack.

“Basically, yeah.” Trinity smiles and releases her. “Just, please figure it out soon. You have no idea how close I am to shutting you two in a supply closet and wedging a chair against the door handle.”

At the look on Samira’s face, Trinity adds, “I’m *kidding*.”

“Uh huh.”

“In the meantime,” Trinity says brightly. “Enjoy your reading. Especially that third book. There are a couple scenes in there that never fail to get me off.”

Samira knows she makes a startled noise at this bold announcement, but she doesn’t hear it over the louder reaction of whoever has walked up behind them and unwittingly become part of Trinity’s audience for this overshare. When the voice says, “I’ll come back,” Samira winces, because it’s Jack. Of course it’s Jack.

“Just a little book club we’re starting,” Trinity explains as they turn to face the distressed-looking interloper, which is close enough to the truth that Samira doesn’t feel any more uncomfortable than she’s already feeling.

“Do you like to read?” Samira stupidly asks Jack.

“Not as much as Dr. Santos, apparently.” He says it as dryly as he probably can for someone with an obvious flush along the top of their ears. “Guess I’ve been reading the wrong books.”

Trinity grins at them both, giving Samira a farewell pat on the shoulder as she strides blithely away, both hands on her stethoscope.

When she’s gone, Samira has to laugh a little, just to release the tension. Jack doesn’t join her, but he does look amused, smiling at her when she meets his eye.

“Do I wanna know?”

Because she’s got a backpack full of erotica, or because the red is lingering in Jack’s skin, Samira thinks, *Fuck it*.

“I don’t know,” she says. “Do you?”

The blush comes on full-force, flooding Jack's cheeks. Samira gets goosebumps over the fact that, while Trinity's blatant admission got to him a little, her subtle question colours his whole face like the timelapse blooming of a flower. It makes her think he's not as unflappable as she's always believed him to be.

Naturally, as soon as she provokes the reaction, she feels awkward about it. They're at work! They're professionals! People will hear! (Samira swears Princess and Perlah have been watching her every interaction with Jack lately, glancing swiftly away when she looks at them—as if that doesn't make what they're doing even more audacious.)

"I always let you know when I read something interesting," he points out.

Because this reminds Samira of a study Jack sent her the other day, she goes, "Oh!" and launches into a rapid account of the aspects she found most interesting, in the middle of her ramble before she recognizes what she's done: interrupted flirting with work. In her head, Trinity wonders, *Can you stop thinking about your career for five seconds?* Samira lets her words trail off.

"But, um," she says. "Were you gonna say something? Before? I thought maybe you were coming over to… say something."

"Yeah, I…"

It takes Jack a second, but she watches him remember what he was thinking of before overhearing Trinity. Samira realizes she was hoping it was purely social: that he wanted to say hi to her before she left, that he wanted to talk for a minute, to hear about her shift—not just about the patients she's handing off, but about how *she* is. But it's work. Once she's answered his questions, they exchange an awkward goodbye, and that's it. She goes home.

text message exchange between Samira Mohan & Melissa King

SM

I may need you to slap me when I come over for yoga tomorrow.

MK

…I don't think I can do that.

But we could have ice cream?

If you think that would help.

Assuming that something is wrong.
Is something wrong?

SM

Just with me.

MK

It's my professional opinion that that's not true.

SM

Thanks, Mel.

MK

You're welcome?

I'm not sure I'm helping.

SM

You are.

MK

Yay!

Whatever's going on, I bet you could also talk to Dr. Abbott about it. You told me before that you think he's a good listener, and leaning on your support system can really help when you're having a tough time.

SM

Dr. Abbott is kind of the problem.

MK

Did you guys break up?

SM

What? We're not together.

MK

Oh.

SM

You thought we were dating?

MK

[Melissa is typing]

SM

What I mean is, you thought I would start dating someone and not tell you?

MK

Maybe just not yet?

SM

Mel, you're one of my closest friends. I would have told you.

MK

So, wait, why aren't you dating?

SM

I can't quite figure that out.

I think I keep ruining Romantically Desirable Samira with Work Colleague Samira.

MK

Sounds like that's probably the same Samira. Why would Dr. Abbott want you to be two separate people?

SM

I guess he wouldn't.

MK

Then I bet he's just trying to figure things out too.

SM

You're probably right.

I just feel like a human disaster right now.

MK

I don't think I can talk (or slap) you out of that.

But, again, I do have ice cream.

It's April Fools' Day when Samira's schedule next aligns with Jack's.

Samira requested her first April Fools' Day shift a couple of years ago after hearing Perlah grimly say of the day, "It's an experience," and deciding it was one she should have under her belt. While not catastrophic by any means, the day does seem to generate its fair share of stupid accidents in a way that has made Samira genuinely wonder whether people are confusing it with Halloween; there seem to be a lot of injuries resulting from people jumping out at and scaring one another. Usually, the injured party is the one being scared, but not always.

This is her first April Fools' *Night*, and that has nothing to do with the novelty of cases the holiday tends to produce. This, she had to ask for. She's just decided that trying to figure things out during the two minutes they snag for personal conversations during shift change, and the texts in which it's sometimes difficult to judge and communicate the tone, isn't working. She needs a whole night with Jack.

Not like that.

Well.

Not like that *yet*.

Samira starts her night shift with the purest of intentions. When it's over, she's worried the thing she'll remember about the night is her realization of how touchy Jack is—not in the sense of being easily irritated, but the physical sense. How physical he is with her.

At first, she thinks it's just in contrast to Mel, who is the person Samira's spent the most time with outside of work lately and who doesn't enjoy much casual touching beyond high-fives. Samira considers herself and Mel to be close, but that relationship has much less physical contact than, say, her friendship with Trinity, which is all back-slaps and hip-bumps and pinky-promises not to eat the last takeout eggroll while the other person uses the bathroom. (These promises are often broken.) Samira sees Mel most, with less touching, and Trinity less, with more touching, but when she spends the night with Jack—when she spends the night *shift* with Jack—they are frequently in each other's eyeline, and often in the same room. And when they are…

Jack's hand grasping the back of Samira's as he guides her into position for a particularly precise cut. Jack's hand on her ribs, her hip, as he moves around her. Jack's presence at her back, when he's *not* touching her, turns out to be even worse than the touching, because it makes her want him to lean against her so badly she could scream. Which would be a new way to test whether a patient's general anesthesia has kicked in. With the slightest contact, it feels like he's all over her, and Samira's never been more aware of how desperately she wants him to be.

She's tired when the day shift arrives to relieve them, not just because it always takes her a couple of shifts to really feel adjusted to working different hours, but because she's nursed this divided awareness all night, some of her thoughts always on Jack. As soon as she's passed things off to Cassie, Samira feels herself grow as dull as unpolished silverware (why do people *keep* running with forks?). She turns away from Cassie's start-of-shift energy and sweeps a glance around the ER. It's the first time all night (now day) that she hasn't been able to immediately spot Jack.

While they work, they talk about work (even if he manages to touch

her while they do it). As tired as she is, Samira was kind of hoping they could talk about something else before they headed home. Separately. To two different homes. They could talk about something benign, but something friendly, at least. Some personal inquiry. Something to make their weary faces smile, and make Samira feel close to him in some uncomplicated way. A couple times during the night, it looked like he might want to, but now he's not around, probably already left the hospital. Oh well.

She's almost at the lockers when she feels her phone vibrate in her pocket. When she pulls it out, it's Jack asking, *Meet me on the roof?*

Samira changes course, walking towards the elevator.

He's looking left, squinting into the sun that's just rising. The light he's awash in is so golden Samira could almost forget how cold it is up here. Though the immediate briskness is refreshing, waking her up, Samira crosses her arms against the chill. She's glad she wore a long-sleeved shirt under her scrub top today; Jack did not, and she wonders whether having his hands in his pockets is helping much. The roof access door thuds shut behind her, and he turns.

"I've never been up here before," Samira says, stepping out of the shadow of the building.

Beyond the lee, a quick wind whips up the loose strands of her hair, then disappears, leaving her where the sun strikes her, where Jack squints hard at her, like she's the brightest light.

"You ok?" he asks.

Samira shrugs.

"I'm not scared of heights."

She assumes he isn't either, since he's closer to the edge of the roof than she plans to get. She would be alarmed if he didn't look so at ease there, twisted back towards her with his arm extended along the rail that's probably there for safety reasons. She's curious about the temperature of the metal. Is it still cold against his skin? Has the sun heated it yet, or is the light too new?

Samira approaches, stopping to grip the rail with both hands. She can feel Jack looking at her, but she's looking out, into the city. She isn't afraid—not back here, where it's safe.

“You wanna step through?” he asks, tensing as though to shift sideways, to give her room to duck under the rail.

She laughs anxiously and blurts, “No! I don’t have a death wish.”

She tears her eyes from the street stretching southward, from the cars creeping and bunching in morning traffic, and looks at Jack, expecting him to laugh too. There’s a shadow across his face that has nothing to do with it being turned away from the sun. Samira loses the tail of her laughter like a kite string, feeling it pull away into the air.

When she sees that look on his face, she doesn’t have to ask, but she does, packing the question into his name, pushing it out though her throat feels suddenly choked: “Jack?”

“Don’t worry,” he says.

And she numbly echoes, “Don’t worry.”

“It’s nothing new. If anything, it’s habit.”

“Standing up here.”

“Uh huh.”

“I guess I never really ask about *your* hobbies, do I?” It’s a whisper of a joke, and Samira thinks it might be a panic response to Jack’s nonchalance.

He laughs.

“You’re laughing,” she commentates.

“You’re funny,” he answers simply.

“Great,” she says distantly. “Good for me.”

“Samira.”

The sound of her name focuses her. She drags her drifting gaze back to Jack’s face. The light peeking around the edges of him is so bright that she cups a hand next to her temple, trying to shade her eyes. Jack raises one of his own hands, flat, moving it until it casts a shadow on her and she can look at him without being blinded.

It’s not subtle when she asks, “Are you ok?” It’s not the kind of approach she would take with a patient, if she found them on the roof

of the hospital. But this is Jack, and though she can't yet fit this new piece into her idea of him, she knows enough of the others not to fear asking bluntly.

"Short answer," Jack says, "yes. And no," he adds before she can speak.

Samira shakes her head. "I don't get it."

"And I haven't been able to think of the best way to explain. I'm letting you in the best way I know how. That way might suck ass."

That startles a smile out of her because, yeah, it's not great, but it also doesn't feel wrong. Jack has never been theoretical; he's taught her with experience, with practical application, with touch and pressure and clarity that don't come until she's in the thick of things, knowing it'll be as much work to go back as to go forward. She's always gone forward.

"You won't jump if I come over there, will you?"

"I'm not going to fall off this building unless you push me," Jack promises.

Samira takes a deep breath, then steps over the lower rail and ducks under the upper one.

He steadies her when she stands up on the other side, though the roof is flat and the raised edge is a foot away. It's not so bad—she's not even shaking—but she waits a minute before slackening the grip she's taken on Jack, letting him have his hand back. They stand side by side, her shoulder pressed to his arm, as they both look out.

"What do you think about up here?"

"What I'm going to make for dinner."

Samira turns to him with narrowed eyes.

"I know what you meant," he assures her, sighing, still looking straight ahead. "I don't think you wanna know."

"Tell me one thing."

She watches Jack breathe, even though she has to squint.

"I think about the fact that the people I work with are the people who

would…" He swallows. "That it'd be somebody I know who'd have to feel for a pulse."

"That's awful," she says, hearing the judgement in her voice. Hoping he hears the sympathy.

Jack nods.

"But," he says, "there's something about knowing who you leave behind. That I'd be in the right hands."

"Isn't it better to be in the right hands when you have a pulse?"

He looks at her and smiles. "Yeah, it is."

She must still look pretty worried, because he continues, "You know everybody's got their shit, right?"

Samira sighs and nods.

"Yeah."

"Nobody's one hundred percent solid."

"Yeah," she agrees, "but if I touch you, will I pass right through?"

He says, "Try."

Her heart races like it didn't when she stooped under the rail as she turns and steps in front of Jack, putting herself between him and the edge. He presses back into the rail to give her room, but she's not scared now. Standing with one foot between his, Samira inches close, closer. She hears him inhale when she puts her cheek against his chest. He breathes out. She leans in, resting her weight against him, and Jack hugs her around the shoulders, forearms locked across the top of her back. She can feel how fast his heart is beating, just like hers. With a slight shift, she slides her hands up under his scrub top, palms pressed to his back through his undershirt. She closes her eyes. The sun glows through the lids.

"Thanks," he murmurs.

"It's selfish," she replies. "The next time you're up here, you'll think about me instead."

He doesn't agree, but he doesn't argue. She feels the puff of his soft laugh in her hair.

A minute goes by, maybe two. In that time, their hearts slow, Samira's mind calms, Jack grips her a little less desperately. They hold one another like this is the most natural position for two bodies at rest. Samira imagines them on a train to somewhere—Chicago, say—riding with her head on his shoulder. She imagines his head on her lap while they watch TV. His arm, heavy across her body, when she wakes up in his bed, just long enough before he does to make sense of the weight holding her in place, sheltering her through the night.

Samira shifts her cheek against the front of his shirt, slowly tilting her face up. She wonders if he feels her heartrate ramping up again, because his picks up too. She straightens to look at him face-on. Sunlight meets the left side of his face like a hit-and-run, leaving shadows dashed across the right on its way past: the side of his nose, his eye socket, his temple. Jack warps them as he angles his head. He's looking at her mouth the way she's seen him look at a surgical instrument seconds before he asks for it, when he's still considering if it's the right tool for the job, if it can do what he wants it to. Samira parts her lips and thinks, *Try*.

The thump of the roof access door closing makes her jump and jerk her arms out of Jack's shirt.

"Mornin'!"

Jack stops Samira from tripping over his foot—or worse, back over the edge of the roof—in her frantic haste to make it look like they weren't just about to kiss. With his stabilizing hand on her arm, she emerges sheepishly from behind him. At least, that's how it must look to Dr. Robby, who seems pretty stunned to see her here, appearing as if out of thin air. He actually stops walking, his head cocking so suddenly it's more of a twitch as he looks from Samira to Jack, Jack to Samira. Slowly, he starts smiling.

"Thought I might find you here," Robby says, very clearly directed just at Jack.

"And you did," Jack confirms, now turned to face Robby and, as usual, shaming Samira with his casual posture as he leans forward on the rail with both forearms while she stands next to him in a mild panic.

Robby sidles forward, still grinning.

"Dr. Mohan," he says, greeting her with a nod.

“Hi, Dr. Robby.”

He chuckles a little, and she would love to escape. Unfortunately, he has her cornered on the edge of a roof. That’s how it feels. She can’t even look straight at Jack, the feeling of being caught too confusing to blend with the excitement of almost kissing him. Will he take her hand and make a statement of it? Will he make an excuse for her presence that Robby absolutely won’t buy? But he does neither, calmly maintaining his pose on the rail.

Robby glances between them again.

Finally, he offers, “I can go,” hitching a thumb back over his shoulder towards the door he came through.

“No,” Samira says quickly. “No, I need to… I need to get home.”

She’s through the rails and beyond Jack’s reach in a second, smiling with forced cheer into Robby’s face and somewhere over Jack’s left shoulder.

“Take care, Dr. Robby,” Samira says frantically. “Um, Dr. Abbott.”

“Samira,” Jack says, as she’s about to turn away and possibly sprint to the door. He says her name like it doesn’t matter that Robby’s here to hear it, or like Robby isn’t here at all. She meets Jack’s gaze. Something in his says he isn’t sure, he isn’t ready, but he called out to her anyway. “Let’s…?”

With Robby possibly looking on, Samira gives Jack the smallest smile and agrees, “Let’s.”

Samira takes to Trinity’s romance novels like a cynical twenty-two-year-old art student to the community-minded, brown-eyed barista at her local coffee shop. Or an ambitious fashion intern to a moody tattooist. Or a passionate boulderer to a feisty librarian. Etcetera.

She isn’t at the Oakland Library this morning because she’s trying to step into the last book she read (though, god, Trinity was right about that one; Samira might have fanned herself a couple times over what the boulderer could do with those strong fingers). No, it’s because she’s already blazed through the three Trinity gave her that she’s come. Come *here*. Trinity’s eyebrows raised, impressed, when she handed the books back, and she promised to text her a list of additional recommendations. So, Samira’s here. Ready with her list.

Trinity was right—a phrase to be said aloud at one's own peril, sure to provoke extended gloating—about these books helping Samira to understand what she wants. What she wants has nothing to do with being made the perfect, bespoke latte with flavours that honour her personal journey; or with getting subtle but significant ink, the sting of the needle matched by the pleasure given on the same table when the tattoo's finished; or with letting go of multiple inhibitions at once by finally learning to raise her voice while being fucked on the top of a mountain. Nothing that specific, and nothing that generic.

The truth is she imagined Jack every time, in every role, at every location, fictional and real. Because he has been. Ok, not in the places it names in Trinity's books, but here, in Samira's life. What's changed for her is that she's done running into him by accident.

She finds him in a reading room. She smiles because he got here first even though he's the one who just came off the night shift; for Samira, it's a day off.

He's picked a spot by the window, his bag in the seat next to his, reserving it for her. Because he has his back to her, she gets to watch him openly as she walks up, the line of his shoulders as he leans slightly forward over whatever he's reading. When she gets to him, she lightly places a hand on one of those shoulders, and Jack looks up immediately. He smiles at her. She's heard of moths getting into archives, but do libraries ever have a problem with butterflies? Her stomach's suddenly full of them, and they all take flight at once, up into Samira's chest.

He says, "Hey."

And she says, "Hi," her insides all aflutter.

"I'm just going to the fiction stacks," she explains. "I'll be back."

"I'll be here."

Samira turns away grinning, because *he'll be here*.

The books on Trinity's list aren't those classic Harlequins with windswept couples in long dresses and open, blousy shirts standing in front of ruined castles. Those are in the romance section. Trinity's are mixed in with regular fiction, so Samira gets out her phone and scans the shelves for the authors' last names. Once she's holding four hardcovers, she decides to take them back to Jack's table, where she can read all the summaries to determine which ones she might want

to check out—though she's reconciled herself to potentially wanting all of them, carrying a large, empty tote over her shoulder since she's not fitting any of these in the belt bag slung across her chest.

She deposits them next to Jack, and he casts a quick and curious eye over the titles. He doesn't look *surprised*—he knows she's here for Trinity's recommendations, and she's sure he hasn't forgotten the conversation he partially overheard—but he does look interested. So much that Samira instinctively waits a minute as he flips open the cover of the book at the top of her stack. She looks too, taking in at a glance the words "steamy," "sensual," and "swoon-worthy." Her gaze skitters to Jack, searching for his reaction, but he's already looking at her.

"I— There are more," she stammers, pointing back towards the stacks.

"You want help?" he offers.

"Oh, well, I don't want to leave our stuff unattended…" She gestures to her books as well as Jack's bag and the tablet he was reading on.

"No problem," he says, tucking his tablet away and shouldering his bag.

Samira reaches for her books, but Jack says, "I got these. You'll need your hands free," and if she didn't know by the way he was looking at her after reading the synopsis, she knows now, a hot rush of heat to her face as he maintains eye contact.

So, he's literally carrying her books, and she's guiding him into the depths of the fiction section, even though her phone's in the back pocket of her jeans and all the authors' names have fled from her mind. As they come to the end of an aisle, Jack sets her books on a shelf unprompted and catches her fingers with his, tugging her around the end.

"There are cameras," she warns giddily. "Or, there could be. And there are people…"

She's aware she should probably sound more like she gives a shit. Jack laughs, but it's a distracted sound, and there's a clear fight to lift his eyes from her mouth.

"What is it you think I'm about to do?" he asks.

Samira opens her mouth to answer.

“Actually, don’t tell me,” Jack requests. “I’d probably do it.”

When he kisses her, she’s flushed with the idea of all those other things the kiss could be. It’s a very good way to be kissed.

He doesn’t kiss her softer because it’s a library, which is a weird thought that passes, light as a feather, through her mind. Jack kisses Samira exactly as it makes sense for him to, even if she’s only realizing that as it happens. His mouth is assertive, certain, even as he brushes the back of his fingers gently across her cheek. His own is prickly with stubble after coming straight off the night shift, but she doesn’t mind. It’s easy not to mind when he lets her change direction when she wants to, increase the pressure when she wants to, catch his lower lip between her teeth when she wants to.

“Samira,” Jack teases, face pressed to hers. “There could be cameras.”

And she laughs and behaves, just kissing him and not getting carried away. Just kissing him, after she’s wanted to for so long.

Chapter End Notes

> Lemme know if I just goofed the slow burn by letting them kiss in chapter four 😬 Alternately, lemme know which of Trinity's made-up romance novels you would be most likely to read.

Beds

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Samira works with the trowel in her right hand and the gloved fingers of her left to scrape out and round the hole. The light from the solar lanterns isn't enough to do much more than this—she can't see well enough to weed the soil around the squash shoots or pinch suckers off the young tomato plants or deadhead the French marigolds that border the vegetable beds—but the earth is cool and damp, and she likes to work by touch.

When she has a row of holes, sliding a foam kneeler along as she digs, Samira straightens up, forcing her shoulder blades together to crack her back satisfyingly. She rolls her neck next, glancing up at the sky. The stars near the horizon are beginning to wash away, but up above, it's still black and deep and twinkling. She'll need to stop soon and get ready for work.

During her first week after volunteering to help with her building's rooftop community garden, Samira had the same uncertainty she felt before—buying blue beads, agreeing to attend Mel's yoga class, keeping her colleagues' pets alive while they were at work, telling Trinity that one book she kept talking about sounded good. Added to that was a bewilderment at realizing she, a lifelong city girl, would need to learn new instincts here. When and how to water, so the new plantings wouldn't wilt or have their leaves scorched by the afternoon sun. How to recognize aphid damage, and learn to leave the spiders alone so they'd eat them. She didn't need to be taught to lift from her knees when grasping the handles of a heavily-laden wheelbarrow, but she did have to learn how to steer its single wheel so it wouldn't list and spill. She knows so much more now, including what the sky looks like when she still has time to devote to the garden. She rarely checks her phone up here.

Though she has to wake up earlier to garden, she likes the quiet, how it settles her at the start of the day.

Samira goes to the layered wooden bench where they keep the things awaiting planting. Some of these were bought at garden centres—new additions to the rooftop garden—but some were grown from the seeds of past successes and hardened off: started in the windowsills of her

neighbours' apartments, brought up to the tool shed when the nights grew warm enough, gradually introduced to the sun. She's working on the herb garden, so she flips up the tarp that protects the plants from frost overnight and peers through the dark at the roughly organized plants, selecting basil and parsley by their leaves.

Back at the raised bed, she lowers the herbs into their holes, alternating parsley and basil down the line. With the watering can resting nearby, she pours a pool around the roots before using her trowel to sweep dirt into the extra space, packing the plants in snugly. Content, Samira removes her gloves and gently bats the basil leaves, raising the sweet scent that's going to linger on her hands. She tents a clear, plastic sheet over the bed, for someone else to lift if the day gets warm enough.

As she tidies her tools away, her mind leaves the garden. Its meditative powers have been helpful lately, but those only last so long. Then he comes back; it comes back: Jack Abbott, and the fact that they haven't had sex yet.

It was a month ago that they kissed in the library, and it's not like the time since has been a total drought. If his night shift's been slow, she's come in early to her own day shift, and they've drunk fast-cooling coffee together on the roof from mismatched mugs, her hand on his arm, his fingers in her hair, a few slow kisses as they lean against the safe side of the rail. They've had breakfast (for him, breakfast for dinner) together when his shift's over and she has a day off, his hand heavy and thrilling on her thigh below the tabletop, but no more than that—he needed to get home to rest. It's almost always work that's working against them, schedules perpetually at odds. When they were both on the night shift together, Samira thought, *Here we go*, heading home with Jack. She watched him while he drove, smiling at the cut of his cheek below the sunglasses he put on to block the morning stream through the windshield. In his kitchen, he turned on the light, leaving the rest off and the blinds closed, the living room dark beyond his bedroom, and the bedroom itself dim with the door half-open. She remembers thinking, *We'll shower after*, because they'd come straight from the hospital, and she planned to sweat, to make *Jack* sweat, when everything between them ignited at last. They hadn't gotten more than halfway through foreplay—Jack's hand up her shirt, scooping her breast from the cup of her bra; Samira's hands trembling as she undid his pants and he groaned into her neck—before sheepishly agreeing that, actually, they were pretty hungry. They tried to maintain the mood, ordering food in rather than going out, but he let her lean against his side as they ate on the couch, and one thing

led to another…

Meaning they woke up groggy on the couch in the middle of the day, and though Jack took her hand to drag her into his bedroom, it was only so they could get a few more hours of sleep before they needed to be up for work again.

That evening, Jack drove her in: showered, presentable, disheartened.

He said, “Soon.”

And she sighed, “Yeah.”

But again, this has been going on for a month. Her body is more than just a vessel for her brain. She’s not going to do something drastic, like send him nudes from the ER bathroom or make him take a break so she can blow him in his car, but Samira *has* thought of these things, which is pretty drastic for her. And every day that passes, he sends her thoughtful texts when they aren’t working together, shoots her meaningful looks across the ER when they are. One day, he called to ask for her exact address, and she gave it, knowing he wouldn’t be on his way because he was about to start work. Sure enough, Jack didn’t show up at her door, but a bouquet of flowers did, enveloping her in the scent of lilacs.

She’s never been more sure about striving for something she just can’t figure out how to get.

The last of the basil scent is gone after Samira rubs sanitizer between her palms, coming out of a treatment room. She walks past the doors to the ambulance bay without turning in that direction; plenty of her colleagues like to catch a glimpse of the sun when they’re in here under artificial light all day, but she’s not interested. It’s night she wants. Probably because she associates night with Jack, which is stupid and Pavlovian and kinda teenage-girl-with-a-vampire-fantasy of her, but she can’t help it. She’ll see the sun when she leaves. To her, it always feels like the days get longer faster than they get shorter. Maybe she’s an optimist. Maybe she’s delusional. Either way, there will be enough days to bask in that warmth as May rolls on. Right now, she’s more interested in body heat.

Like they can read her thoughts, Princess and Perlah are looking at her as she strides over to check the board, glancing up to see what’s next. Samira admires the two of them daily, grateful for their reliability, for their experience, for their support. Separately, she feels

like each of these women is a miracle, acting like the extra pair of hands she's always wishing she had at work. Together though…

Together, Perlah and Princess are Flotsam and Jetsam from *The Little Mermaid*, but not evil. They're the Tweedles from *Alice in Wonderland*, but not inane. They just have this perceptive, mischievous power as a duo that seems to exist purely to extract and communicate gossip. Samira was naïve enough to find it entertaining before there was something about *her* worth gossiping about—an eventuality she would never have predicted.

"Did you go out last night?" Perlah asks her from behind the desk.

Samira glances down and blinks. She catches the look Princess shoots at Perlah, as if that was too blunt a question.

Perlah covers by adding, "I'm living vicariously through you. My kids have colds. I had to wade through used tissues to get out of there this morning."

Samira can truthfully respond, "No, I didn't go out."

"Any plans for tonight?" Princess inquires slyly, straightening some pens.

"Uh, I don't think so."

"You can join us at the park then? For a beer?"

There's an undercurrent like this is a test, like Samira will bow out with some thin excuse, revealing that she actually *does* have something to do after work, and his name is Jack Abbott. If only.

But Samira shrugs and says, "Sure," trying not to laugh at the annoyance on Princess's face. Samira knows it isn't that Princess doesn't want her there—it's just that what she *really* wants is confirmation on the rumours Samira has a strong feeling have been going around.

"Our girl is consistent," Cassie says, coming up next to her and folding her arms on the counter. She nudges Samira with her shoulder.

"Consistently boring," Princess corrects, but it's with a well-meaning wink to let Samira know she's just teasing.

Samira laughs.

The thing is, Cassie knows. She knows because she used to be a smoker, and Chad's been pissing her off lately (something to do with which one of them will be a parent supervisor during Harrison's upcoming field trip to the Museum of Natural History), and if she goes out back to smoke, Dana will catch her (because she's out there smoking already). So, Cassie's been darting up to the roof, and the only other people who regularly use the roof are, as far as Samira knows, herself and Jack. Which means, when they were up there full-on making out a few weeks ago, they got Cassie's unbridled laugh of surprise as an interruption. As an apology, and as commiseration from one person who values their privacy to another, Cassie's been doing her best to deflect pointed questions directed at Samira.

Samira appreciates Cassie, and the increasing closeness of their friendship, but she knows lasting secrecy is pretty unrealistic around the Pitt, with her and Jack both working here. Though most of the staff (apart from Cassie, Mel, Trinity, and Dr. Robby) don't know anything for certain, Samira and Jack aren't exactly trying to hide. They're just discreet. Except for making out on the roof.

They haven't talked about it, haven't said who they'd tell or when, but she let him know when she told her friends, and, obviously, he was there for the other two finding out. Jack doesn't mind—not that Samira ever thought he would, but it's good to know he wasn't hoping to keep things a secret. Keep *her* a secret. He was slightly uneasy around Trinity right after Samira told her, but that's because Trinity kept giving him these knowing looks. Eventually, she chanced a "You sly dog" as they were passing each other, and Jack had to pull rank to remind Trinity that was not an appropriate comment to make to her attending physician. Though he apparently undermined the reprimand immediately after by surreptitiously sticking out his fist for Trinity to bump. Trinity told Samira the whole thing after the fact. She sees a bright future for her friendship with Dr. Abbott, which is a little terrifying.

Samira's own relationship with him hasn't been so clearly defined. For once in her goddamn life, she doesn't feel like she needs to tell people, *And this is Jack, my boyfriend*. *She* knows she's in a relationship, and he knows, and they kiss when they can, and would both like to be doing more. Neither of them is seeing anyone else, and he might have never seen the inside of her apartment, but he knows her preferred order at three different coffee shops, and she knows sitting on the couch next to him is the easiest she's ever fallen asleep. Though they're having to try pretty hard right now, she loves the ease of actually being together. She loves when he finds a minute to call her in the middle of

the night. She loves working with him when she's on nights. She loves…

"It's not complicated," Jack asserts mildly.

Robby laughs like he just told him there's a bomb in the elevator shaft he wants Robby to defuse with a wad of bubble gum. He scratches his forehead, giving Jack this manic, scrunched look.

Jack crosses his arms, waiting Robby out. He's standing on the far side of the railing, closer to the edge, but he's perfectly calm. It's just to freak Robby out, since he wants to be unreasonable.

"It's always complicated," Robby counters.

"Nope."

"When?"

"Collins," Jack points out. It's the silver bullet to this whole conversation, and he knows Robby knows it. *Good luck to him*, Jack thinks.

Robby's face scrunches even harder, and he starts his argument, "Ok, *well*," which is always a strong opener. "That's not… *not* complicated."

"Right."

"I'm sorry, you do realize you're proving *my* point and not yours, right?" Robby says, gesturing from his own chest towards Jack.

"My point is that however complicated the situation between you and Collins is or has been, you want to be together, and you're working on it, so the net complicated versus uncomplicated is actually zero."

Robby stammers a bit at that, even crushing his hands into fists in irritation. Jack tries not to smile.

"Your weird fucking logic isn't real logic," Robby accuses.

"Works on you though."

"Collins and I don't count."

"Won't Heather be thrilled."

Robby gives Jack a look.

“You’re Dr. Mohan’s attending,” he says.

“Only sometimes, and I don’t treat her any differently than I do anyone else.”

“Bull*shit*,” Robby fires back, because it is.

“So fuckin’ what?” Jack counters, spreading his arms. “If I pay her more attention, she learns more. If we break up, she’ll probably get even better just to show me she never needed my help to become the most kickass doctor in there.”

“Including you?”

“Yeah,” he has no trouble saying, “and including you.”

“You’re too old for her,” Robby says, abruptly changing direction.

“The similarities between our situations continue,” Jack comments dryly.

“She’s too good for you.”

“Damn right.”

Robby sighs and rests his hands on his hips, hanging his head. After a minute, he comes up to the railing, grabbing it with both hands. He still has his head down, but he flicks his gaze up to Jack. Jack stares back while Robby assesses him.

He didn’t think it would be easy, hashing this out with him, but he also isn’t worried. It’ll be a cold day in hell when Robby doesn’t ultimately side with him, doesn’t lend his support. It’s like Robby forgets Jack knows this, and Robby’s own compassion is always somehow the plot twist right before the end. Jack doesn’t lord that over him; there are a lot of things Robby’s better at than he is. He respects the hell out of the guy.

Besides, if Robby tries to tell him not to pursue a relationship with Samira, Jack will just do it anyway. He figures that’s one of the things Robby’s taking into account as he studies him. The hint is the resigned look he gets in his eyes while his hands are still throttling the rail, like giving in is a real struggle, like he wasn’t absolutely fucking delighted to see Jack and Samira up here back in April. After knowing, by the

way, how Jack had been feeling about her for, god, a solid year. (He clocked the damn yearning, apparently. Fucking Robby. Fucking therapist.)

“If she hurts you,” Robby says in a tone of surrender, pausing for a sigh, “I’m keying her car.”

“Samira doesn’t drive.”

“Bus?” When Jack nods, Robby vows, “I’m snapping her bus pass in half.”

“Hey, man, what happened to ‘do no harm’?”

Robby flaps an arm at him and walks away.

Jack’s done now that Robby’s here, so he stays put a little longer, slipping back between the rails so he can lean on the top one and look out on the waking city. He doesn’t see the stars much; it’s the only thing he misses working so many nights. As the rising sun hits the windows of apartments and office buildings, he squints against the shine on the glass, squints until it narrows into specks of brilliant orange, scattered like a supernova. Then Jack opens his eyes, seeing spots as he turns away. Towards the door. Towards the building. Towards Samira, who he can spare a minute to stare at because she’ll have just started her shift.

two weeks later

Last block, she thinks, hitching the bag higher on her hip like it’s a cranky toddler she needs to put down for a nap. Samira huffs a breath and keeps going, wagon wheels rattling along behind her.

The small urban garden centre attached to the hardware store is something she’s always noticed from the window of the bus: the early dots of colour when they put out their first flowers in spring, the tall leaves of banana plants shading the cement pad invitingly when the temperatures climb in July. It looks like a little oasis for people who have schedules conducive to keeping anything other than a cactus alive. Since Samira doesn’t fall into that category, she’s never stopped in. Now that she’s contributing to her building’s gardening effort, she has a reason to. She just didn’t consider how much *farther* it would feel on foot. Lugging five bags of potting soil. (She only meant to get three bags, but it was buy four, get the fifth free, so… The garden’s always gonna need dirt, right?)

Samira pauses before she reaches her building, shifting the soil again as she unzips her belt bag and feels around for her key. She hates fumbling for it at the door of her building, especially with night coming on, worried about being distracted, worried that an apparent do-gooder who might hold the door for her will actually be a stranger she's unwittingly giving access to the building.

A car honks too close to her, and Samira jumps. Somebody probably just tried to merge without signalling. Some days, she wishes she drove, but most days, she's glad to avoid the stress of it. She feels the key. She curls her fingers around it and zips her bag shut, grabbing the wagon handle she left balancing against her hip.

Samira's no expert at recognizing specific cars by the sounds they make, but when she hears more honking—rapid and insistent—she can tell it's all from the same vehicle. She looks up, wondering what's going on, right as Jack calls her name through his open passenger window. He's idling near the curb, where the parking spots would be if there was street parking here. (There's not.) Basically, he's obstructing traffic to ask, "You want a hand?"

Samira laughs in disbelief, but says, "Sure," pointing to show him which building she lives in, where he can turn into the belowground lot and find the visitor parking.

"Ok," he says, "stay put."

Yeah, she can do that. She sets the bag she's been carrying at her feet, exhaling in relief.

Not two minutes later, Jack's walking towards her. He looks good—unburdened, somehow. Samira wonders if it's just because he's not at work right now (she thought he was supposed to be at work right now) or if it's because of her. That's it, *that's* what looks best about him, she decides: that he's coming towards her. She loves surprises.

She says loudly, before he's quite reached her (because she's too excited to wait to start talking to him), "Were you looking for me or is this a *Pretty Woman* thing?"

Jack snorts.

"Would I have stopped the car for just any beautiful woman? Hell no. By the way," he adds archly, "did you know your foot's as big as your arm from your elbow to your wrist?"

Samira laughs and asks, “Julia Roberts fan?”

“What can I say? I appreciate a woman with curly hair.” And he’s with her, sweeping hers back to kiss her hello.

When he does, he smells good—like, not the way they usually smell around each other, hustling around the Pitt—and he’s clean-shaven. She likes the scruff (it’s rugged in a way that makes her want to tie his hands to her headboard and *bite* him), but if Jack really has time to spend with her right now, and any of that time involves kissing, she can see some advantages to his smooth face.

“Aren’t you on the night shift?” Samira checks when he pulls back, before she lets her smooth-faced thoughts unravel too far.

“There was a scheduling error, apparently. They didn’t need me. I got the night off.”

She smiles at him, delighted.

“Why didn’t you call?”

“I wasn’t sure if you’d have other plans,” Jack admits. “No yoga class? Nobody’s iguana waiting to be fed?”

She laughs and shrugs at the light-hearted teasing.

“I’m all yours. I…” Samira stammers. “I mean…”

Jack isn’t letting her off the hook with the look he gives her, but he doesn’t press. Instead, he stoops and grabs the bag of soil at her feet. As they walk to her building, Samira explains about the garden. She’s mentioned it to him before, mostly to explain why she’s been texting him back earlier in the morning than usual, but not in much detail. Jack has his eyes on her the whole time as they walk, rapt to every word she says. It feels like they’re back in the ER, and not like that at all.

“What’s up with the wagon?” he asks as she lets them into the building and they wait for the elevator.

“It’s Langdon’s. For his kids,” she clarifies. “I mentioned to him the other day that I would pick up some dirt for the garden if I had a way to carry it, and he offered.”

“Walking Zachary’s paying dividends.”

Samira laughs. “I guess so.”

The elevator opens and they step back to let someone out. Then, Jack motions Samira in first, and she goes, wheeling the wagon close to the wall so he can step inside after her. She digs her thumb into the button for the top floor. When she glances at him, he’s already looking at her—straight at her, so obvious it makes her heart execute a sloppy tumble in her chest. Jack’s in her building. In her elevator. About to go upstairs, where her apartment is. They’re not going up *to* her apartment at the moment—she needs to drop off the soil—but they could. Easily. He won’t have work again until tomorrow night and,

“I have the day off tomorrow,” Samira tells him.

The look in Jack’s eyes intensifies.

“Oh, I’m aware.”

She nods and says breathlessly, “Cool.”

The elevator door slides shut.

Chapter End Notes

One left

Hobby Girl

Chapter Notes

humming "Golden Hour" by JVKE

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes two trips, but after leaving the wagon at the foot of the stairs leading to the roof, Samira and Jack haul up the soil. They set the bags next to the shed, and then Samira has nothing in her hands. She tries not to be too aware of that.

The thought distracting her is that this isn't very impressive. She never exactly thought she would be showing Jack any of it. (Except maybe in pictures; is that a fun thing to text your crush? Young broccoli?) Daylight is failing, and some of the beds are still being tarped at night out of an abundance of caution, since it's mid-May, so she can't give him a thorough tour, pointing out all the little shoots she feels so proud to be helping tend.

"It looks better in the sunshine," she promises despondently, staring across covered rows.

"I like it," Jack says. Samira turns to him. "I like it right now."

He's staring at her, not the plants, and she wants to protest because she knows what he's really saying, but the little Trinity on her shoulder won't let her. *You were flirted with.*

"I guess it's got something," she concedes, smiling.

"Yep."

And, alright, she begins to see. Not *what* he's seeing, but how. The sun's setting in a citric gash, looking like outer space is an orange the world's just started to peel. The light finds them in the garden, and if Samira glances around, she can see that everything is green and gold. Mostly, she studies Jack's face. Peach with longing, a cantaloupe heartache—the good kind of heartache, an enormity of feeling—the sun turns him the colour of things that grow ripe and sweet. Samira's heart bobs high in her throat.

Setting fast now, the sun falls low enough that the solar lanterns kick on, and this combination of soft and blinding defuses the garden in

some kind of wavelength that only exists in dreams and fairytales. Everything is sharp and blurred, velvety and bright. Samira steps between the wooden trellises that will be scaled by peas and beans in the coming months, and Jack follows. The sun squeezes through the spaces formed by the crisscrossing boards, bursting into diamonds that shift across Jack as he approaches. Her heart might be stuck up there in her throat, or else there just aren't words.

He kisses her with his hands hungry on her back. The force of it bows her into his hold, but his arms only tighten, bringing her towards him again. So they rock this way and that, and then not at all as they lock into a rhythm, all their motion in their lips, in Samira's fingers, clawing into the fabric of Jack's shirt. She moans around his tongue, the sound seeming to enter his mouth like CPR for the way it enlivens him even further, until her clit throbs at how he's devouring her, until his hand on her ass pushes her up against his erection.

She's betraying her youth, pressing a hand between them to rub him through his jeans the way she does. It's the hand job of bathrooms at high school house parties, of college dorm rooms when she didn't know what time her roommate was getting back. It's the hand job that comes to mind at the words "third base." It's coloured by the tactics of furtiveness, of conquest, of firsts, but means none of those things anymore. She's just eager, eager to have him. The air smells green and tart, and he's kissing her like he wants her (and he always kisses her like he wants her, but this is a whole other gear she's never before felt him shift into), and it's been *months*. It's been fucking months! If she seems that horny, it's because she is. She forgot how much she likes the feeling of a dick through denim.

"Right here?" he asks, sounding stunned. Not discouraging.

"Nobody's gonna come up. Probably."

Jack ducks his head and groans, "*Fuck*," into the side of her neck.

She knows that, psychologically, her touch must seem inexperienced, and, physically, that the strokes without any kind of lubricant must feel harsh, but Jack is panting like this is just the right kind of rough. Maybe he just didn't expect her, the vigilant overachiever, to lose her mind and grope him in a community garden. On a roof. After transporting a bunch of soil in a child's wagon. Samira didn't really see this coming herself.

Jack claps a hand on her shoulder in a way that would feel collegial if

he weren't gasping his release in her ear at the same time. When she stops, she's breathing hard and her wrist hurts; she hooks her index and middle finger through one of his beltloops and lets her wrist dangle. It's a passive leash, this hold on him. He could break her lazy grip if he wanted to, but he lets her keep him tethered, slowly begins to kiss her neck.

"I guess I couldn't wait," she whispers, and then they both start laughing.

Jack says, "Samira," a smile in his voice, and slings his arm loosely around her back, catching at her waist.

"We don't have to do anything else," she sighs.

At that, Jack raises his heavy head and gives her a baffled look.

"I mean up here!" Samira explains. "God, I mean up *here*. We definitely have to do more."

"We should definitely fuck," Jack agrees, blunter and grinning because of it.

"I'd be into that."

"What a relief." He suggests, "Let's get outta here before it gets so dark we fall down those stairs."

That's pretty reasonable, it seems to Samira. Jack kisses her, then they disentangle themselves only to re-entangle themselves as they walk: Samira catching a different beltloop, Jack sticking a possessive hand in her tight back pocket. She's about to point out they shouldn't go down the stairs like this if they want to avoid that fall when she remembers something.

"Wait! We could stay up here awhile and see the stars!"

"Already saw 'em," he quips, "but I appreciate the thought."

Like that, she's flustered, but in a comfortable, pleased way that makes her want to bury her face in his shirt only to tug it off with her teeth a minute later.

"Why don't you show me your apartment?" he prompts, gaze hanging on her lips like her fingers on his beltloop.

"That was going to be my second suggestion."

“Sorry.”

“Not at all,” Samira assures him, “I’m glad we agree.”

Jack gives her ass a squeeze before withdrawing his hand from her pocket, motioning for her to walk ahead.

After work today, Samira quickly came home, changed, and hurried out to buy dirt. Her clothes and hair are clean, but she hasn’t yet had the shower she typically takes to wash off her shift: tiredness, sweat, hospital smell. She’s barely begun to explain when Jack cuts her off. He gets it. (Hello, same job.) She lets him use the bathroom first, tells him where the spare washcloths are, since, well, he’s not exactly fresh in his clothes either after what they did on the roof. Then, when he tells her to go take her shower because he doesn’t want to mess up her routine, it’s like Samira’s been hit over the head with a cartoon frying pan. *God*, this is what she’s been like! So diligent about her routine, her goals, her *diligence* that opportunities used to pass her by. Not this one specifically—Jack Abbott calmly wandering around her apartment while she shuts herself in the bathroom and flicks the fan on—but surely others. Well, she’s learned, and just in time.

“*I’m going to have sex with that man*,” Samira murmurs to herself in a rush of air, fixing the clip that’ll keep her hair out of the spray.

The last thing she does before getting in the shower is open the bathroom door a crack. It’s not exactly an invitation for him to join her, just a way to not shut herself off from any more possibilities of what *could* happen.

Within the glass walls of her shower, Samira alternates between rushing and zoning out as water spatters her like warm rain. She soaps herself *everywhere* with hurried hands, to clean, then lathers herself with bodywash, to smell good. Pomegranate something. She shaves one leg and almost leaves the other prickly, absorbed by visions of Jack’s hands sliding up her calves. She reminds herself that this is happening whether she takes three and a half minutes in the shower or five. He’s not going to be gone when she gets out.

Samira shuts off the water and takes a deep breath.

Jack—who else would it be?—taps at her bathroom door, not presumptuous, even though it’s ajar.

“You can come in,” she tells him.

He does, and while he's obscured a little by the steamed-up shower walls—the bathroom fan *rarely* works—she can tell he's glancing around with fast, assessing eyes. Especially in her direction. But he doesn't apologize for intruding, and she's not sorry she let him in.

Jack has her bath towel in his hands when she opens the shower door. She can see the tension in him, the way he swallows as she steps out onto the bathmat. She can see that he's getting hard, because treating injured bodies under harsh lights isn't anything like this, as many of those as they see. She's a cascade of water droplets. Just those, and the clip in her hair.

When Samira turns, Jack wraps the towel around her from behind. Her heart is racing, her chest heaving as her lungs inflate with as much of the humid air of her bathroom as they can take. She swipes the water from her arms, then secures the towel under them, tucking the end in at her chest. Jack's mouth tickles her skin as he skims it from her shoulder to the nape of her neck. His hand comes around her front searchingly. Blunt nails scuff across her clavicle before his palm presses to her sternum. His fingers splay, then creep up her throat to her chin. Jack tilts her head to the right, his mouth meandering up the left side of her neck. Her eyes close. She gasps when he sucks.

"Maybe I should… show you the bedroom," Samira pants.

"Maybe you should."

Jack surrenders with concessions, hands brushing over the shape of her body through the towel before he pulls away. She remembers the night of the mass casualty incident, the way she couldn't calm down. She feels like that now, without the horror. It might take another emotional catharsis to steady her. Samira doesn't intend for that to be her bent over the sink sobbing again, but if she lets Jack keep kissing her neck like that, keep running his hands over her, it might end up that way—just with his reflection behind hers in the mirror. Standing at her back, he has a presence that makes her want him to pound her into the vanity, that makes her think he'd do it until her eyes rolled back if she would only ask. But she doesn't really want her first glimpse of what his expression looks like when he's inside her to be in a fogged-up mirror.

"Please," he says, gesturing for her to show him the way.

Again, she walks ahead.

Not that Jack couldn't have found the bedroom on his own. It's even

possible that he was already in there, part of the self-guided tour he took of her apartment while she showered, but Samira thinks probably not. A bedroom is personal in a way a kitchen isn't, tells a more detailed story than an entryway, even one blocked by a borrowed wagon and adorned by an anomalous men's jacket on a hook by the door. He wouldn't just go in, not without her.

Samira turns on her bedside lamp and looks back to Jack, leaned against her doorframe.

"This is it," she says.

There's a voice in the back of her head telling her she should do something sexy right now, like produce a bottle of red wine or drop her towel with a flourish. The voice isn't Trinity's, though she has a bold confidence to her that might make those choices right for her in a similar situation. Samira ignores the voice, because it's also not her own. She wants to be herself. The self she thought she'd be neglecting if she drank beers in the park with her colleagues after a shift. The self who took care of people with her hands, but never made anything. The single-by-choice self, because the only bigger distraction than an interested partner would be recognizing that she too has emotional needs she wasn't allowing to be met. Physical needs. Samira knows that self a little better now.

She looks at Jack and remembers the last year, the last six months. Her struggles with beads after a wake-up call from Cassie, doing yoga with Mel, walking Zachary to make Langdon's life a little easier, reading the romance novels Trinity recommended, finally spending time with her neighbours in the community garden after living in this building for *three years*. She hasn't stuck with every hobby, but that doesn't matter. Trying all these new things was supposed to be something Samira did for herself, and it has been, but it's also pulled closer all these people who were just on the periphery of her life before. Forget the beads and the books, Cassie's made her look up from her work, Mel's helped her find refuge in her body when her mind is overwhelming, Langdon's just gotten her *out* on days when she didn't realize how much she needed it, Trinity's paradoxically coaxed her into the real-life romance she might've only ever pined for without interference, and Samira… Samira has done some things for herself too. She's learned she loves rooftops.

And she maybe loves Jack.

It might be him she's pulled closest. Looking at him, she remembers

his joking offer of a getaway car. What would he do for her now? What could she do with him, since she doesn't want to run? Samira takes the clip from her hair and sets it on her bedside table.

"Are you coming in?" she asks, ruffling her hair to help it untwist.

"Yeah," he promises. "I'm just looking at you."

"You do that a lot."

"I know. I'm tryin' to go pro."

Jack pushes away from the wall and ambles into her bedroom. Samira steps forward to meet him.

"If you do have to close your eyes at some point, I'll still be here," she says.

She sees her promise strike deep behind the line of Jack's defenses; something in his eyes is stricken, but it fades, leaving gratitude. She knows she's bringing a lot to this moment, but so is he.

"Keep saying stuff like that and I won't leave," he says.

His remark teeters between threat and promise: *Wouldn't I be a thing to endure?* or *I'm here with you, and here's the key that'll keep me*. Too vulnerable or too self-assured. Jack has shades of both. Samira doesn't know which one he meant to come out when he spoke, but she has an answer to make everything simple. It's an honest one, simple itself.

"Ok," she says.

She stretches up a little more than usual to kiss him, because he still has his shoes on. Because he still has his shoes on, he pulls her close, but tries to get her to move next to him as he starts to sit near the end of her bed. Samira doesn't want to sit beside him. She's spent *years* beside him. So, when Jack sits, glancing up at her as he reaches down towards his shoes, she knocks his arms aside and climbs onto his lap. Rationally, she knows she wants to have sex with him fully naked; and to fuck him fully naked, he needs to take his pants off; and to take his pants off, he needs to take his shoes off; and her getting in the way of that last thing means getting in the way of everything else, but *fuck*. She wants to be impatient for once. She wants to do the irrational thing.

Knees clamped to Jack's hips, Samira opens his mouth with her

tongue until he groans, clutching her back. She has his face in her hands, fingers kneading behind his ears. Who cares about breathing? She wants him *closer*. Jack grabs her ass like he wants that too, but when she tries to shuffle closer, the towel pulls taut from how she tucked it in, not letting her widen her thighs any further. She keeps trying, but she's fighting it, mind on the towel instead of kissing Jack. It's digging into her legs, so she just yanks at the top to release the pressure, and Jack gets a fistful of towel from behind, and then it's gone completely. Samira sighs a sigh of delayed frustration. She shifts forward and rocks her hips, grinding her clit directly against Jack's jeans, where his dick makes a thick ridge that's just right for her purposes. The feeling's harsh—too harsh, maybe—but she does it twice, crying out, before Jack says, "God, Samira, *fuck*," and throws himself onto his back.

With his feet still on the floor, he tugs her forward, over some other textures she wouldn't mind exploring: his leather belt, the soft cotton of his t-shirt, the skin of his abdomen when his t-shirt rides up. He doesn't stop until she's over his chest, her thighs on his shoulders, and then he quits urging and pulling and shoving her along.

He stares up at her and says, "Your call."

Which is trust and a taunt and a demonstration of control and an acknowledgement of hers. She is in control. Samira breathes hard and stares down at Jack. There's no doubt in his eyes—no doubt about her, or about what she'll choose. There's a smirk threatening to develop at the corner of his mouth before she covers it, whispering her cunt across his lips. Beneath her, she feels his chin tip up, then the wet curiosity of his tongue. She's gently shivering before he's even done much, shivering over the intent in his eyes, the, well, surgical precision as he outlines her with the tip of his tongue, shivering at the thought of this happening at all.

Jack's touch is still delicate when he strokes her just right, flicking the underside of her clit. She gasps brokenly and jerks her hips to force a second pass along his tongue. It's an instinct that shatters how still she's been trying to keep, poised over him and concentrating on each sensation. Apparently, shameless need works for Jack; his hands, which have been resting lightly on her calves, leap to her hips. They pull at her like he wants her to do it again, like he's going to guide her. Panting, Samira looks down, smooths her hand lovingly over his hair. When she burrows her fingers into the short curls and tightens her grip, his eyelids flicker shut. He opens his eyes again, daring her to show him exactly how she wants it.

Samira begins to work herself over him steadily, then with greater and greater abandon. Jack squeezes her hips, her ass, no longer attempting to guide the way she moves, but definitely urging her down onto him. She can feel him breathing through his nose, through his slack mouth when he stops licking to breathe. Samira grinds herself against his upper lip, shuddering at the sensation of his smooth skin, slicked with her arousal. He lets go of her just once. In the tingling haze of her building orgasm, she hears the jangle of a belt buckle, the zipper of Jack's jeans. Then his hands are rubbing up her lower back, and she's hunkered over his face with her knees spread wide, and his tongue is toying with her clit, sucking, somewhere in there *biting*. He knocks the wind out of her just as she's tensing up, tossing her onto her back, but he's up on his knees, wrenching her thighs apart before she can miss him, his mouth back between her legs. Samira screams—actually *screams*. She's seen Jack's single-mindedness in the ER, watched him go to work on someone with all his focus, all his skill. She probably should have known.

He stays once she comes, tongue flat and slow in long licks until she wriggles away, pushing at his shoulder, murmuring that she can't. Samira breathes hard, staring at the ceiling. It's no good without him there either. Her legs are twitching, her cunt pulsing, as she rolls onto her side, grabs his hand, and stuffs it into the tight space between her thighs. She watches him with her mouth open as she rubs herself against his fingers.

"That's perfect," he mutters to her, and she wants to rub all over him.

With his free hand, Jack grabs the hem of his t-shirt and peels it up to wipe clean the bottom half of his flushed face. Without looking away from her, he slides his hand down. He sneaks it in where he unfastened his jeans and grips himself through his underwear, inside his underwear. When Samira comes again, Jack switches hands, pumping himself with fingers slippery from getting her off. She kisses him, languid and sloppy, gliding her hand down his arm to cover the back of his hand, to feel how it moves when he's stroking himself.

"You know I'd rather be inside you," he says against her lips.

She doesn't point out that the condoms in the drawer of her bedside table have practically been burning a hole there, waiting to be reached for, waiting for her to bring Jack home. She just moves away from Jack, reluctantly, and retrieves the box, dumps a couple condoms out onto the tabletop so they'll be within reach. Meanwhile, Jack sits up and pulls his shirt over his head. Somehow, seeing him half-naked

makes Samira more aware of her total nakedness, though it didn't bother her when he was waiting with her towel in the bathroom, or when she was crouched over his face, gripping his hair to direct his tongue. As he bends to first remove his prosthesis, then his left shoe, she sidles up and runs a hand over his back. Dips of muscle, ribs, vertebrae. Her fingertips make an unpublishable study of him. When he straightens, watching her from the corner of his eye, she leans her face on his shoulder.

"I'm glad you're here," she says, because she doesn't think she's mentioned that.

"Yeah?"

She nods, rubbing her chin across his skin.

"I was starting to, you know, lose my mind a little bit," she confesses.

"A dangerous thing for a doctor to do." Quieter, Jack adds, "Me too. You know I think about you all the time, right?"

Samira smiles into his shoulder, kisses it.

"So, day after tomorrow," he says, "when you go back to work. Your whole head's gonna be in it?"

"Of course."

"Then I've done my duty to the people of Pittsburgh."

Samira wants to protest this, to tell him she doesn't want him fucking her for *the greater good*, but he kisses her (he's ridiculous) and she gives in (so is she).

They don't stop kissing as they strip him bare, her hands not really helping, but too restless not to try. She lies back, kicking the bedding down, and Jack crawls over her. He slips a hand under her back, pulling her up into him as they kiss. Samira thinks these last few minutes before he's inside her might be the ones to finally break her sanity; she arches to press their chests together, can feel herself getting wet again because the hot length of Jack's cock is cradled in the hollow of her hip.

He licks her neck, grinding lightly against her, and murmurs, "Or we could wait."

Samira releases a sound so raw with frustration that Jack's laughing as he reaches towards her bedside table.

"Would I do that to you?" he demands.

Exasperated, she takes the condom from him, tearing the wrapper away. She hears his breath catch when she abruptly reaches between them to put it on him herself.

But he doesn't give up, repeating his question as he nuzzles his face into her hairline and kisses her temple: "Would I do that to you?"

Jack hooks an arm under her thigh, easing it towards her chest as he braces his right knee on the bed. "Samira, baby, would I leave you unsatisfied, huh?" He rocks against her cunt, and she can't answer, suddenly desperate to align them. Jack sways back a minute, nudging his face into her breast, sucking the hard nipple. Her hands go to the back of his neck, eager to keep him in place, even as there's a spasm between her legs, her impatient body wanting to clench around him.

"*Jack*," she moans, tugging at his neck.

He surges forward, pinning her down with his gaze as he grips himself, fitting the head of his cock to her wet center. His hips flinch forward and back until he's lined them up just right and he presses deep, taking her in a long stroke that makes Samira gasp soundlessly and cling to him. Gently, Jack unfurls her grasp. He restrains her wrists on either side of her head. He holds her there, all the motion in his flexing thighs and rolling hips. She has her left leg hitched high, up to his waist, her right leg splayed aside. Jack drops close, grinding his pubic bone into her clit, and she's hot all over, sweating, straining.

"*Fuck*, *fuck*, *fuck*," she babbles, trying to work herself against him, trying to move just enough beneath him to locate relief.

She wants him to take her harder—can hear herself pleading for it—but Jack likes to do things his own way. He keeps up his slow grind and, even as her brain is screaming, her body rewards it, practically convulsing around him each time he sinks deep. Samira has tears running from the corners of her eyes when he tenderly kisses her cheek, when he lets go of her wrists and slides his palms over hers, interlacing their fingers.

"Still with me?" he checks, mouth close to her ear.

She lets out a sob, the friction charging between their bodies almost

intolerable. Her hair is stuck to the back of her neck with sweat.

“Harder,” Samira requests hoarsely. “Please, Jack, *please*!”

Merciful at last—though his expression is stern the way it is in the ER, when he’s wordlessly asking her to mirror his composure—Jack releases one of her hands to grip the edge of her mattress. With this leverage, he drives into her forcefully. Samira turns her face towards his forearm and scrapes across his pulse point with her teeth. She’s so wet he moves like he could slide straight through her. She’s so wet she’ll have to change the sheets.

With the hand she now has free, she pulls her other leg up. Jack breaks his rhythm to hitch it over his arm before grabbing the bed again. It’s a new angle, and she’s gasping at the feel of him.

“I could say,” she pants, “this wasn’t what I had in mind every time I did yoga, but…”

Jack smirks.

“Pays to experiment, huh, hobby girl?”

“Does it ever,” Samira agrees.

He ducks his head to kiss her, softening his thrusts. Sometime after they tighten their hold on each other’s hand, but before she starts rhythmically smoothing her free hand up and down his back, Samira comes with a shudder and an arch of her spine. Jack comes after, sighing praises of her beauty into her hair.

Since something’s already gone wrong with his schedule, Jack gets the rest of his shifts for the week switched to days. It means Samira gets two full nights with him before she has to go back to work, and when she does go back, he comes too.

He drives them in from his place, where they spent the second night. Even before they walk through the doors together, Samira knows it’s obvious where they’ve been, what they’ve been doing. She doesn’t care. Until their shift starts, she doesn’t plan to take her eyes off of Jack for any longer than she needs to. And he’s always had a tendency to stare.

When a few hours have gone by and nobody’s said anything to Samira directly, she corners Princess and, feeling a little silly, asks if

anybody's noticed.

"You and Dr. Abbott?" Princess checks.

"Yes. This place loves gossip," Samira says defensively, "so I kinda thought… I don't know. Wasn't there a bet or anything?"

At that, Princess laughs out loud.

"About whether or not you two would finally get together? Be serious. Who would've bet against that?"

Chapter End Notes

> Since posting chapter 5, this fic has become my fifth-most subscribed to work ever. Thanks for being excited to read each new chapter and for the love in the comments along the way 🐈‍⬛💕

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!